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ABSTRACT

California's Pupil Proficiency Law requires each local school district to adopt standards of proficiency in the basic skills of reading comprehension, writing, and computation. Students are to be assessed in grades 4-11. Students not making sufficient progress towards meeting the district's standards are to be provided with remedial programs, and school personnel are required to hold conferences with parents to inform them of their child's weaknesses in basic skills. After June of 1980, no student may be granted a high school diploma unless he or she has met district proficiency standards and completed the course requirements set forth by the school district. This study was designed to examine the progress of a representative sample of 155 local school districts in implementing the Pupil Proficiency Law and attempts to point out problem areas which may require policy clarification, redirection of state technical assistance, or both. In addition, in-depth case studies were conducted in 15 districts. Major findings are organized into three areas: district tests, curriculum and instruction, and effects on students. The survey instrument used to collect proficiency assessment data from selected district superintendents is appended. (Author/RL)

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Proficiency Assessment in California

1980 Status Report on Implementation of California's Pupil Proficiency Law

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Proficiency Assessment in California

1980 Status Report on Implementation of California's Pupil Proficiency Law

A Report Prepared by the Department of Education's Office of Program Evaluation and Research in Response to a Request by the California Legislature

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Executive Summary

California's Pupil Proficiency Law (AB 3408 as amended by AB 65) requires each local school district to adopt standards of proficiency in the basic skills of reading comprehension, writing, and computation. Students are to be assessed in grades four-six, seven-nine, ten, and eleven. Students not making sufficient progress towards meeting the district's standards are to be provided with remedial programs, and school personnel are required to hold conferences with parents to inform them of their child's weaknesses in basic skills. After June of 1980, no student may be granted a high school diploma unless he or she has met district proficiency standards and completed the course requirements set forth by the school district. The law grants broad discretion to school districts in determining their basic skills assessment and instructional procedures. The State Board and State Department of Education are precluded from either promulgating a statewide proficiency test or conducting monitoring or compliance reviews of local procedures. Instead, the role of the Department has been limited to provision of technical assistance and training to assist districts in meeting the requirements of the law.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to examine the progress of local school districts in implementing the Pupil Proficiency Law. In addition to reviewing overall implementation of the law, the study report also attempts to point out problem areas which may require policy clarification, redirection of state technical assistance, or both. The study was initiated at the request of the Assembly Education Committee, Subcommittee on Educational Reform, and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Education. It builds upon the findings of a similar study conducted by the Department during 1978-79.[1]

Study Procedures

The study utilized a representative sample of 155 school districts. Questionnaires mailed to district offices were used to elicit information on district tests, enumerative data related to the proficiency law, and specific implementation issues. In addition, in-depth case studies were conducted in 15 districts. The case studies involved interviews with district personnel, principals, and teachers. Student reactions to proficiency testing were gathered through a questionnaire administered at each high school in the case study sample. A complete description of study methods and procedures is included in Chapter 1.

Major Findings

Major study findings are organized into three areas: district tests, curriculum and instruction, and effects on students.

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[1] Proficiency Assessment in California: A Status Report on Implementation of the Requirements of AB 3408/76 and AB 65/77. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1979.

District Tests

A large majority (78 percent) of school districts have developed their own proficiency tests, rather than purchasing commercially developed tests. This approach seems to have engendered understanding and ownership of the tests among teachers. However, because of a lack of expertise in test construction among local district staffs, many of the locally developed tests displayed flaws, such as inadequate directions for test takers, poor layout, lack of test item specifications, and failure to review for bias. Many of these tests could benefit from careful review and refinement.

Content analyses of the skills included on district tests revealed a relatively consistent view of basic skills across districts. Very few districts in the Department's sample chose to assess skills that were very simple or unusually complex. The most striking variation was in the choice of whether to assess "school skills," "life skills," or some combination of the two. Many districts (47 percent) assessed a combination of "school skills" and "life skills." Thirty-nine percent of districts chose to emphasize primarily "school skills," while 15 percent emphasized "life skills."

Given the lack of comparability of district tests, it is technically unfeasible to pinpoint the relative "difficulty" of these tests. Instead, the study used a group of curriculum content specialists to examine the complexity of skills assessed by districts. After reviewing a sample of tests, the mathematics and writing specialists concluded that the tests consistently reflected minimum basic skills. The reading specialists were unable to reach any firm conclusions on the relative complexity of reading comprehension skills assessed. Most districts seem to be assessing the same types of basic skills. While the data revealed a few subsections of tests that were unusually simple or complex, the complexity of skills assessed on district proficiency tests does not appear to vary a great deal.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Parent Conferences

Administrators in 42 percent of the high school and unified school districts reported that the Proficiency Law was having a "significant" effect on curriculum and instruction. Another 56 percent of these districts reported at least a "marginal" effect. In addition, more than 90 percent of the high school and unified school districts reported that more time was now being devoted to basic skills instruction than in the past. The data also suggested that districts are making serious efforts to link proficiency objectives to their local curriculum and instructional program.

Some of the study data addressed the question of whether basic skills were "taking over" the curriculum and instruction in high schools to the detriment of more advanced courses and other subject areas. First, it was apparent that many more students than might have been expected (30-50 percent of tenth graders) were failing at least one portion of the proficiency test, and that these students were being enrolled in one or more remedial classes. To the extent these remedial classes consume student instructional time, it is likely that opportunities to take advanced or elective courses have been limited. Moreover, the English and mathematics teachers interviewed indicated that responsibility for planning and conducting basic skills and remedial instruction was falling disproportionately on high school English and mathematics departments. This, the

teachers felt, unquestionably had limited the availability of advanced courses in English and mathematics. The paradox inherent in this issue is how much students who are deficient in basic skills could benefit from more advanced courses, whether in English, mathematics, or other subject areas. But, if students are not challenged to aspire to learn higher-level content and skills, there is a danger that the high school curriculum could become trivialized. This issue certainly merits further study.

The Proficiency Law requires schools to request parents of students failing proficiency tests to appear for conferences to discuss student progress and review the kinds of remedial programs the school will be providing. This provision was intended to foster a close working relationship between home and school in helping the student to improve his or her performance. Study data suggest that large numbers of parents of high school students are not appearing for conferences. About 25 percent of the sample districts reported that less than half of the parents of failing students attended the conferences. Eleven percent of the districts reported that less than 25 percent of the parents came to the conferences. With little more than one year left before diplomas are to be withheld if students fail to meet proficiency standards, this problem seems serious. Concerted efforts seem to be warranted to ensure that parents are aware of proficiency requirements and are urged to respond to requests to appear for conferences.

Most districts are using a variety of approaches to provide remedial programs for students who fail proficiency tests. Virtually all districts reported using in-class remedial work, while about two-thirds reported using tutorial programs. About 60 percent of the districts were using special "pull out" programs. Another 40 percent of the districts were planning to use summer school. Districts reported a number of problems in organizing remedial programs. First, many high school teachers were inadequately trained to teach remedial basic skills, and there was little evidence that extensive in-service training had been made available to upgrade the teachers' skills. Second, while many districts responding indicated that "basic skills" curricular materials had been developed, few reported providing in-service training for teachers in effective "basic skills" instructional practices. Finally, student absenteeism emerged as a major problem, especially in the larger urban high schools. Many teachers commented that in addition to their responsibilities to provide programs which would motivate students to learn basic skills, they faced a prior task--motivating students to attend school in the first place.

Effects on Students

In each of the case study schools, a class of eleventh grade students was surveyed in order to learn what students knew about proficiency requirements and to get their general reactions to the tests. This sample is not a representative cross-section, but student awareness was nonetheless encouraging. Almost all (96 percent) of the students surveyed knew that they had to pass proficiency tests in order to graduate from high school. Almost 90 percent of the students responding had taken one or more proficiency tests, and three-quarters of these students felt that the tests were set at "about the right degree of difficulty." The remaining 25 percent of students were evenly divided as to whether the test was "too hard" or "too easy."

tests during the 1978-79 school year (as high school sophomores). About half of the districts responding reported that 70 percent or more of their students had passed. Conversely, about half the districts reported that less than 70 percent of their students had passed. Of this later group of districts, more than 30 percent reported that less than 60 percent of their tenth graders had passed. While districts were not asked to project failure rates for these students when they become high school seniors in 1981, the proportion of students failing as high school sophomores seemed high. Two caveats are important in considering these findings. First, despite follow-up requests, the response rate from districts on this question was relatively low (62 percent). Second, in some cases, the passing rates reported may have been from "field tests" of district proficiency tests, rather than from administrations of the final tests the districts had decided on.

District boards are given the option to adopt policies providing for "differential standards" for students in special education programs who have diagnosed learning disabilities that would preclude them from attaining the district's regular standards even with appropriate educational services and support. Should districts elect to adopt differential standards, the standards for each student must be included in that student's individualized education program (IEP). The Department's 1979 study reported that a relatively small number of districts (about one-third) had adopted differential standards. At the time of the previous study, many districts had not yet considered the issue. Data from the current study were more encouraging. Of the responding high school and unified school districts, 58 percent had adopted policies providing for differential standards, 13 percent had elected not to adopt such policies, and 22 percent of the districts reported that they had not yet considered the issue. Of continuing concern is the relatively large number of districts that have not yet considered the differential standards option. By default, these districts have elected not to provide differential standards.

Introduction

The pupil proficiency requirements first became law in the fall of 1976 (AB 3408) and were later modified in 1977 (AB 65). They require students in California schools to demonstrate proficiency in the basic skills, as measured by the locally adopted standards, prior to receiving a high school diploma. After June of 1980, students will be expected to meet district proficiency requirements in reading comprehension, writing, and computation in addition to meeting local course of study graduation requirements. The class of 1981 is the first class to be affected by the diploma sanction.

Proficiency requirements direct local districts to: (a) adopt proficiency standards in reading comprehension, writing, and computation; (b) select or develop measures or procedures to assess student proficiency and set passing scores; (c) administer, score, and report proficiency test results; (d) hold conferences and remediate students not making sufficient progress; (e) provide opportunities for reassessment; and (f) deny diplomas to students who do not demonstrate proficiency in the basic skills.

The State Board of Education, through the State Department of Education, is required to: (a) make available a framework for proficiency assessment which includes sample assessment items; and (b) provide information on the status of district implementation activities to the Legislature. The State Department of Education is not required to collect any type of monitoring or compliance data from local school districts.

The issues examined in this study were identified jointly by representatives of the Department of Education and the Legislature. Mounting concern about the possibility of legal challenges to California's pupil proficiency law influenced, in part, the issues that were investigated.

In testimony before the Assembly Subcommittee on Educational Reform on December 10, 1979, Department representatives outlined the legal issues the proficiency law was likely to be challenged on. Based on analysis of the legal issues, the Department noted that future court holdings related to proficiency testing would likely depend heavily on the decision of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida in Debra P. v. Turlington.[1]

In summary, the court held: (1) Florida's competency testing program did not give all students adequate notice of the fact that they would have to pass a competency test in order to graduate; and (2) the competency testing program carried forward the effects of prior racial discrimination in violation of the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. As a remedy, the court enjoined Florida from using the test as a diploma requirement for four years--until the 1982-83 school year. The court did not, however, enjoin use of the competency test during this four-year period for assessing the effects of instruction. In addition to the notice and discrimination issues, the Department's analysis also

[1] No. 78-892 Civ.-T-H (M.D.Fla. decision 7/12/79), 48 L.W. 2058 (7/24/79).

indicated that since each local school district is required to develop or adopt its own proficiency standards and test, the quality of these tests may be a more significant issue in California than it was in Florida.[2]

The Assembly Education Committee's Subcommittee on Educational Reform has maintained an active interest in district implementation of proficiency assessment. In April of 1978, the Subcommittee requested that the Department conduct a survey of all local school districts to gather information on district progress in implementing the law and to identify problem areas and needs for technical assistance. The study report was published in June, 1979. Data from that study and the current study were used to:

1. Provide the Legislature with updated information on implementation activities for information and decision making.

2. Provide the Department with information on technical assistance needs of local districts.

The current study follows up on issues raised in the June, 1979, report[3] and examines:

1. The content and variability of district tests

2. Notice to students and parents about proficiency assessment

3. Relationship between district tests and local curriculum and instruction

4. Procedures for conferences and the nature of remedial programs

5. Effects on students, including minority students and drop-outs

6. Extent to which differential standards policies for special education students have been adopted

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[2] See California State Department of Education, "Implementation of California's Pupil Proficiency Law," Testimony Before the Assembly Education Committee's Subcommittee on Educational Reform, December 10, 1979.

[3] Proficiency Assessment in California: A Status Report on Implementation of the Requirements of AB 3408/7o and AB 65/77. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1979.

Chapter 1
Methodology

This 1980 study of proficiency assessment is a descriptive account of district implementation activities. Information on these activities was collected in three ways:

1. A content analysis of district tests to describe their form and content (Measures Substudy)

2. A survey to gather data on notification and the use of test results, experiences with conferences and supplementary instruction, effects on special populations, and the impact of proficiency assessment on curriculum and instruction (Implementation Substudy)

3. A series of structured interviews to gather more detailed data on questions raised in the Implementation Substudy (Case Studies)

The remainder of this chapter provides a description of the design of each substudy.

Measures Substudy

The Measures Substudy, which began in the spring of 1979, examined the content and form of a sample of district tests and gathered survey data about test development processes and policies.

A. Sample: A stratified sample of 144 districts was drawn using four demographic variables[1] to stratify: district size (based on enrollment); district type (unified, elementary, or high school status); district location, (urban, suburban, or rural); and district socioeconomic status (SES) (percent of students in families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)). Table 1 describes the sample.

The six largest districts in the state, representing approximately 21 percent of the total student population, were included in the sample.

B. Instrumentation: A questionnaire was mailed to 144 district superintendents on May 21, 1979. Directions specified that the questionnaire should be completed by the person most knowledgeable about proficiency assessment. Questions were designed to gather information on the following issues:

1. How the test was developed

2. How passing scores were set

3. How test results were used

4. Percent of the class of 1981 that passed the initial test

[1] Taken from the California Assessment Program.

TABLE 1

MEASURES SUBSTUDY SAMPLE

Demographic variables	Districts: Number in sample	Districts: Percent of total	Districts: Number responding	Districts: Rate of return
Type of district				
Unified	52	36%	48	91%
Elementary	57	40	44	77
High school	34	24	26	76
Community size				
Urban	24	17%	21	87%
Suburban	62	43	57	92
Rural	58	40	40	69
District size				
Low a.d.a.*	56	39%	39	70%
Medium a.d.a.*	50	35	43	86
High a.d.a.*	38	26	36	95
Socioeconomic status				
Low percent AFDC**	50	35%	38	76%
Medium percent AFDC**	37	25	29	78
High percent AFDC**	57	40	51	89
Total responding	N=144		118	82%

*Average daily attendance
**Aid to Families with Dependent Children

Districts were requested to submit copies of their test(s) with test specifications, field test information, and other supporting data. The letter requesting tests assured districts that the Department would keep tests and supporting materials confidential.

C. Respondents: The last column of Table 1 shows the rate of return to the Measures Survey, by demographic variables. Although 118 questionnaires were returned, only 65 districts submitted copies of their tests. Fewer districts supplied supporting documentation.

To increase the response rate, follow-up phone calls were made to the district proficiency assessment coordinator, and a second copy of the questionnaire was sent. Although both requests produced 118 responses, districts which withheld their tests cited the following reasons:

1. Secure tests: A few districts chose not to send sample tests, despite the Department's assurance that they would be kept confidential.

2. Commercial tests: Districts that used commercial tests responded that sample tests could be acquired from the publisher.

3. Consortium-adopted tests: Districts that developed their test cooperatively often did not have the authority to release tests also used by other districts.

4. Elementary districts: Many elementary districts had not completed test development at the time the questionnaire was received.

D. Analysis: Three procedures were used to analyze the data.

1. Questionnaire responses were totalled and are reported by percents adjusted for missing data (percents of responses on each item). When appropriate, responses were analyzed by demographics of the sample. On questions where multiple responses were expected, percents total more than 100.

2. A subsample of tests was reviewed by subject-matter specialists from districts and universities throughout the state. The analysis included investigation of:

   a. Number and type of skills being assessed

   b. Form and method of assessment

   c. Appraisal of item and test characteristics

3. Documentation accompanying tests included test manuals, directions for administration, and curricular materials linked to proficiencies being tested. These materials were also analyzed according to:

   a. General test characteristics

   b. Characteristics of: computation proficiencies and test items; reading comprehension proficiencies and test items; and writing proficiencies and test items

The findings from the Measures Substudy are reported in Chapter 2.

Implementation Substudy

The Implementation Substudy conducted during the fall of 1979 examined individual district implementation efforts, including: notice, test results, conferences, curriculum and instruction, remedial instruction, and effects on students with special needs.

A. Sample: The 144 districts selected for the Measures Substudy were included in the sample for the Implementation Substudy. The sample was stratified along demographic variables of size, type, and SES categories. The Measures sample was expanded by 11 districts in order[2] to ensure a proportional sample of high school and unified school districts. Table 2 describes the sample.

[2] Sample revisions are illustrated in the sampling framework in the appendix.

TABLE 2

IMPLEMENTATION SUBSTUDY SAMPLE

Demographic variables	Districts			
	Number in sample	Percent of total	Number responding	Rate of return
Type				
Unified	62	40%	40	64%
Elementary	57	37	38	66
High school	36	23	29	80
District size				
Low a.d.a.*	57	37%	35	61%
Medium a.d.a.*	60	39	42	70
High a.d.a.*	38	24	30	79
Socioeconomic status				
Low percent AFDC** (7.6% or less)	81	52%	49	60%
High percent AFDC** (8.2% or more)	74	48	52	70
Total responding	N=155		107	69%

*Average daily attendance
**Aid to Families with Dependent Children

B. Instrumentation: A questionnaire was developed and mailed on October 19, 1979, to those district persons identified in the Measures Substudy as responsible for implementation of proficiency assessment.

Questions were designed to gather information on the following issues:

1. Initial impact of proficiency assessment activities on curriculum and instruction and activities to ensure that assessed skills are included in course curricula and instruction

2. Notification of students, parents, and teachers of various proficiency assessment activities and the report and use of test results

3. Provision for conferences and organization of remedial instruction

4. Effects of proficiency assessment on special students (including linguistic and racial minorities) and drop-out rates

C. Respondents: In the last column of Table 2 is the rate of return shown, by demographic variables. Follow-up letters to districts were sent to increase the response rate.

D. Analysis: Survey responses were totalled and frequencies are reported by percents adjusted for missing data (percents of responses on each item). When appropriate, responses were analyzed by demographics of the sample. Where multiple responses were expected, percents total more than 100. Findings for this part of the study are reported in Chapter 3.

Case Studies

The Case Studies, conducted in November-December 1979, were a series of structured interviews designed to gather in-depth perceptions of district activities and concerns regarding proficiency assessment.

A. Sample: A sample of 15 districts was selected for the Case Studies. Thirteen of these districts were included in the Implementation Substudy. Criteria used in the selection of case study districts were: geographic and demographic diversity, type of test being used for proficiency assessment, and approaches to proficiency assessment relative to other testing activities.

B. Instrumentation: A detailed structured interview was used. Questions addressed generally the same topics covered in the Implementation Survey. In addition, questions solicited information on effects of proficiency assessment on morale, communication, classroom instruction, and student achievement. A short questionnaire was administered to a total of 413 eleventh grade students in the case study high schools. The questionnaire covered student knowledge of the requirements, the local test, and provisions for remedial instruction. The principal of each high school visited selected one classroom of students to be surveyed.

C. Respondents: Structured interviews were conducted with the following individuals in each district.

1. District person responsible for proficiency assessment, typically an assistant superintendent or director of testing

2. Principals or vice-principals of two high schools (where the district had more than one high school)

3. Math and English department chairpersons in high schools visited

4. Teacher or coordinator responsible for remedial instruction

In addition, various other persons, including guidance counselors and curriculum specialists, were interviewed informally.

D. Analysis: Each interviewer summarized interviews for the case study district he or she visited. Anecdotes from these cases are used to supplement the report.

Chapter 4 contains two case study accounts of district implementation activities.

These two districts were selected as illustrating the particular processes and problems of implementing the state proficiency assessment mandate. Case Study 1 is a large, urban district with a high minority population. The district has considerable measurement expertise and has "gone beyond the law" to adopt standards in social studies and sciences. Case Study 2 is a small, rural district with a small minority population. This district has a limited number of staff working on proficiency assessment and limited measurement expertise.

Chapter 2
District Proficiency Tests

The Measures Substudy addressed the following major questions:

How were the tests developed?

What skills were included in the test?

How were they measured?

How were the test results used?

A one-page questionnaire was sent to a sample of 144 school districts. District personnel responsible for proficiency assessment were asked to respond to this survey and submit copies of their proficiency tests and related material. Multiple responses were possible for each question (percents may total more than 100). A description of the methodology for this substudy appears in Chapter 1.

Test Development Procedures

California's Pupil Proficiency Law requires that districts adopt tests that assess individual student performance in reading comprehension, writing, and computation.

Test Development

Table 3 includes the district responses about involvement in test development. Tests were more likely to be district developed than commercially developed or purchased. Administrators report that tests were developed by teachers in 73 percent of the elementary districts, 80 percent of the high school districts, and 81 percent of the unified districts.

TABLE 3

WHO DEVELOPED THE PROFICIENCY TEST?

Test source	Percent of responding districts			
	All (n=105)	Elementary (n=37)	High school (n=26)	Unified (n=42)
District-developed by teachers	78%	73%	80%	81%
District-developed by central office staff	36	35	27	43
District-developed with consultants' assistance	39	54	46	21
Custom-developed commercial test	11	5	12	17
Off-the-shelf commercial test	19	5	31	24

Analysis by demographic variables indicated that large districts were more likely to use central office staff assistance and customized commercial tests than were small or medium size districts.

Source of Items

Using items from item pools eases the test development process for local districts. Items in item pools or banks typically have been field tested and have validity and reliability estimates. In order to get some indication of the use of the state Sample Assessment Exercises Manual (SAEM) and the use of other item pools, the measures questionnaire asked districts where they obtained their items. Table 4 contains a summary of their responses.

TABLE 4

ARE DISTRICTS OBTAINING TEST ITEMS FROM ITEM POOLS?

Item source	Percent of responding districts			
	All (n=103)	Elementary (n=36)	Secondary (n=26)	Unified (n=41)
Yes, SAEM (SDE-developed items)	40%	42%	38%	37%
Yes, public agency item pool	22	31	23	15
Yes, private firm	16	6	23	22
No, other source	46	50	38	56

Half of the responding districts were using items from item pools. Forty percent of the responding districts had used items from the different volumes of the Sample Assessment Exercises Manual (SAEM), developed by the Office of Program Evaluation and Research. Items from these manuals had been used in 90 percent of the districts where teachers assisted in test development and in half of the districts where central office staff and consultants had developed the proficiency tests.

Elementary school districts used public item pools for their tests more than high school or unified districts did, and the elementary districts used private item pools much less than the other districts did. It is not clear whether this was because of the cost factor, availability, or a lack of test items in private item pools for lower grade levels. Other sources of items included exercises adapted from local curricula and testing materials.

Influences on Passing Scores

Districts used a combination of approaches to set passing scores. Two-thirds of the responding districts used teacher judgment or field test data to set passing scores.

TABLE 5

WHAT INFLUENCES THE DETERMINATION OF PASSING SCORES?

Influence	Percent of districts responding (n=104)
Teacher judgment	63%
Community advisory input	50
Field test data	72
Other	23

Analysis of responses by demographic variables indicated that: teachers were less likely to be involved in the process in urban districts (45 percent) or unified districts (56 percent) than they were in other types of districts. Community members participated in about half of the districts, especially in middle and high income districts. Field test data were used in over two-thirds of the districts and were most often used by urban (80 percent) and suburban (76 percent) districts.

About one-fourth of the responding districts report that information from other sources was used to determine passing scores. These included: boards of trustees (five percent); various types of committees, such as school site councils and proficiency task forces (five percent); statistical approaches (four percent); and other combinations of inputs (six percent).

Passing Scores Specificity

Eighty percent of the responding districts had a passing score for each content area. Most of the remaining districts had set passing scores for subtests within each content area. Only a few districts reported using a single score combining the three content areas (now proscribed by AB 801) or a passing score range (see Table 6).

TABLE 6

HOW SPECIFIC ARE PASSING SCORES?

Specificity	Percent of responding districts			
	All (n=101)	Urban (n=18)	Suburban (n=48)	Rural (n=35)
A combined passing score for reading, writing, and math	3%	0%	6%	6%
A passing score for each subject area	80	72	79	83
A passing score for each subtest within each subject	30	17	31	23
A passing range score	6	11	2	9
Other	5	17	8	6

Even when field test data are used, setting a single passing score is a somewhat arbitrary decision which needs to be revised and reviewed in light of student performance and district remediation capabilities. A procedure for setting a "band-width" scoring range, which may be more fair to students, is discussed in Appendix M of the Technical Assistance Guide.[1]

Test Uses

Proficiency test scores are used for determining student competency in the district's basic skills. Using test results for more than just certifying competency is the beginning of integrating proficiency assessment into the regular program.

TABLE 7

HOW ARE TESTS USED?

Uses	Percent of all responding districts (n=103)
Proficiency certification	90%
Assessing overall proficiency program	34
Course grading	4
Individual student diagnosis	68
Other	7

According to the findings of the 1979-80 study, proficiency test data were used similarly in most districts. Almost all responding districts used test data to certify proficiency in basic skills. Districts also reported using test data for diagnosis and remediation, evaluation of the proficiency program, and to a much lesser extent, in course grading. The districts also reported using curricular planning and improvement, course placement, staff development, and promotion/retention of students.

Although each district established its own proficiency measures, some districts with common interests and geographical proximity had banded together to share proficiency tests. This occurred in one-third of the responding districts. Two patterns for sharing were evident from the data:

1. Districts within a county had formed a formal or informal consortium for test development (20 percent of the districts).

2. Districts maintaining high schools coordinate standards and tests with elementary feeder districts (13 percent). Smaller districts are more likely to share tests.

[1] Technical Assistance Guide for Proficiency Assessment (TAG). Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1978.

Content Analyses

Proficiency tests were reviewed by Department staff and content specialists from school districts and universities to determine what skills were required of students and how those skills were tested. Each subject matter area was treated separately. Reading, writing, and computation content analyses follow. Other content areas tested by districts (such as social science) were excluded from review. Two specialists in functional transfer assessment reviewed test items measuring life skills.

Computation

Almost all districts were requiring students to demonstrate proficiency in the four basic mathematical operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Two-thirds of the districts included measurement on their tests. About half of the districts required computation involving percents; another half of the districts tested geometry (shapes, perimeter, area, and volume). Many districts assessed a student's ability to solve money problems and interpret graphs, tables, charts, or maps. Ten percent of the reading tests also included graphs, tables, charts, or maps (see Table 8).

TABLE 8

COMPUTATION SKILLS BEING ASSESSED

Skill area	Percent of districts assessing each skill (n=63)
Addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of whole numbers, fractions, and decimals	95%
Measurement	67
Geometry	50
Percentages	50
Money	40
Graphs, tables, charts, and maps	40
Consumer math problems	40
Time and wage problems	25
Ratios	20
Metrics	10
Averages, probabilities, and statistics	5

Districts frequently tested consumer math ability. About one-fourth of district tests had time and wage problems. A few tests measured metrics, ratios, probabilities, and statistics.

Other features. The types of items included in the math tests were also reviewed. As expected, there was an overwhelming reliance on use of multiple-choice questions. A few districts employed a fill-in-the-blank/completion format.

Three-fourths of the math tests examined did not measure math proficiency statements uniformly. There are many ways to teach and test similar concepts and operations in math. For example, an addition problem can be arranged horizontally or vertically, and it can have a plus sign or directions that indicate to the student that he or she is to add the figures. This is important, because the response mode on the test needs to parallel the response mode described in the proficiency statement. A related issue examined in the content analysis was the congruence between the proficiency statements and what was actually measured on the proficiency test. Ten percent of the districts listed proficiencies for which no items appeared on the tests.

Curriculum specialists' review. Math curriculum specialists reviewed a subsample of 15 tests for content and test quality.

Most of the 15 tests assessed "school skills"; a few required students to apply computational skills in life settings. An analysis of these life skills items appears in the Functional Transfer section, which follows.

Although most of the math tests measured a common core of basic skills, curriculum specialists found tests that were especially easy (not testing fractions and decimals) and tests that were hard (assessing probabilities, ratios, and Roman numerals).

With regard to overall test quality, one specialist remarked, "Given the constraints of local districts in developing these math tests, the tests were good measures of students' minimum levels of proficiency."

Specialists were asked to make an informal judgment about the readability of the math test. Most math tests required a reading level of about eighth grade or less. Several tests required a great deal of reading within math items. Exactly what the items were measuring was ambiguous in these cases, because they required reading and problem solving abilities as well as math computation ability.

Reading Comprehension

District reading proficiency tests tended to be organized by reading comprehension subskills or the context in which the skills were applied. All tests had reading passages, with test items drawn from those passages. Nearly one-half of district tests measured study skills and the ability to use reference materials. Many of the tests measured vocabulary and ability to follow directions (see Table 9).

Of those assessing reading comprehension subskills, about 25 percent measured ability to find the main idea, to read for details, or to follow a sequence. About 10 percent of the reading tests included maps, graphs, or forms.

Proficiency tests tended to assess either academic reading ability or life skills content. Although all the tests that were examined had the multiple-choice item format, the stimulus material was quite varied. In passages assessing school skills, students were asked to read three or four paragraphs on school-related material. In life skills tests, stimuli included newspaper stories, advertisements, graphs, and illustrations taken directly from original sources.

TABLE 9

READING SKILLS BEING ASSESSED

Skill area	Percent of districts assessing each skill (n=54)
Reading comprehension	100
Study skills/reference materials	45
Vocabulary	40
Following directions	40
Finding the main idea	25
Reading for detail	25
Following sequences	20
Literal/inferential meaning	15
Forms	15
Fact/opinion	10
Maps and graphic information	10
Structural analysis	10
Alphabetization	8
Phonics	5
Decoding	5
Spelling	5
Signs and schedules	5
Newspaper articles	5
Letters	5
Abbreviations	3
Time	3
Reading rate	3

Ninety percent of the reading tests had items matched with district proficiency statements. A few districts listed proficiency statements that were not assessed. These included proficiencies requiring students to decode, understand the use of outlines, and demonstrate an understanding of phonics.

The Fry readability formula was used to determine reading levels in cases where reading passages appeared difficult. In the six tests examined, the results ranged from 6.6 to 8.4 in grade-level equivalents. These passages were characterized by complex sentence structure, difficult vocabulary, or use of jargon, but they were not, according to the Fry formula, overly difficult for high school students.

Writing

A majority of districts required a direct measure or sample of student writing. The number of required writing samples varied from one to eight per test. The student may have been asked to complete a form, write a paragraph, or compose an essay. Requirements included narrative, persuasive, receptive, and expository writing samples. Narrative writing samples called for the description of something. Persuasive writing samples required an organized presentation of an argument. Receptive writing samples asked for something, as in a business letter or

consumer complaint letter demanding satisfaction. Expository writing samples required a description of a procedure or process. The districts called for each of the four types of writing in their proficiency tests in almost equal numbers.

TABLE 10

WRITING SKILLS BEING ASSESSED

Skills assessed	Percent of districts assessing each skill (n=61)
Writing samples	60
Spelling	50
Punctuation	45
Form completion	40
Envelopes and letters	35
Sentence completion	33
Grammar	25
Usage	25
Mechanics	20
Paragraph analysis	12
Oral expression	10
Listening skills	10
Penmanship	10
Vocabulary	8
Use of outlines	5
Proofreading	3

Four methods were used to evaluate student writing samples: holistic, analytic, primary trait, and error count. Holistic scoring requires scorers to internalize a standard and score each sample as a whole. Analytic scoring requires the use of a scoring guide to focus attention on writing components of interest. Primary trait scoring evaluates those features of a writing sample that are relevant to the type of discourse. The error count is a frequency count of grammatical mistakes. Because less than 20 of the responding districts included information about scoring methods used, it would be difficult to make accurate generalizations about the relative use of each scoring method in the field.

The objective portion of districts' writing tests included spelling, punctuation, letter writing, and grammar. One-half of the tests assessed spelling; one-third assessed letter writing and sentence completion; and one-fourth assessed grammar (usage and mechanics). Other content areas assessed under the rubric of writing included oral expression, listening skills, penmanship, vocabulary, outline use, and proofreading.

For most writing tests, a direct congruence existed between the proficiency statements of the district and what was tested. In about 10 percent of the district tests, however, one or more of the proficiency statements were not assessed on the writing test. These tended to be oral expression or listening skill proficiencies.

Curriculum specialists' review. The curriculum specialists noted that the writing tests required too much reading. The specialists suggested including more items measuring sentence manipulation; but they felt the items on punctuation and capitalization were well done. The most difficult items were those requiring students to arrange sentences according to sequence, to complete tax forms, and to interpret legal documents. The readability level of the writing tests was judged appropriate. The curriculum specialists recommended wider adoption of writing samples and the use of holistic scoring.

Functional Transfer

Functional transfer is a term for test items which measure school skills in an applied context. There is no legal mandate to include such items on proficiency tests, but many districts believe the intent of the law requires assessing the ability of students to survive in the world outside the school. Curriculum specialists reviewed a sample of district tests for functional transfer items, and they found that most districts had included some items as part of the reading and math tests. However, the specialists' judgment about the relevance of functional transfer items to student experience varied. Curriculum specialists recommended that districts review their tests to determine whether or not the items were appropriate for the students in their district.

Functional transfer items were often used as alternatives to writing samples in districts where samples were not included. Functional transfer items required problem solving and included a wide variety of content, such as: (1) charts, maps, tables and graphs; (2) newspaper stories or articles; (3) signs and ads; (4) rulers; (5) business letters/addressing envelopes; (6) checkbook registers; (7) employment applications; (8) personal budgets; (9) price/cost comparisons; (10) medical or emergency directions; (11) bike/auto rules and regulations; and (12) time schedules.

Test Characteristics

In addition to information about test development and content, it is important to note what tests look like and how they are administered. The appearance, length, and directions affect student performance.

Proficiency tests and accompanying materials were reviewed for: number of proficiency statements, use of item specifications, layout, test length, and test-taking instructions.

Use of Proficiency Statements and Item Specifications

The number of proficiencies assessed for all three content areas (reading, writing, and math) ranged from 12 to 150, with the majority of districts having assessed between 25 and 50 proficiencies. The more specific the proficiency statement was, the narrower the domain of items to be developed was.

Over 90 percent of the materials had proficiencies that resembled behavioral objectives, and only 10 percent had the detail of item specifications. The curricular implication of specificity is that more detailed diagnostic information is available for the more specific statements. Only 35 percent of

districts responding to the Measures Substudy included item specifications (many of these were test descriptions). Larger, urban districts were more likely to use detailed specifications.

Layout

The appearance of a test is very important in how a student feels and performs in a testing situation. In examining district tests, appearance was perhaps the most striking deficiency. Problems included small print, poor illustrations, and lack of space between items. Almost one-third of the tests had these layout flaws. Many district tests were poorly typed and reproduced. One test submitted was handwritten on a ditto master.

On 20 percent of the tests, the items were crowded together, making the test very confusing. Students must have found it difficult to know where one item stopped and the next began. Another problem was small letters and numbers--some less than 1/16 inch tall (6 point type). Although more items could be placed on a page when the small type was used, this cost-saving measure seems hard to justify if the type limits readability. Another layout problem was the quality of illustrations. In many cases, pictorial and graphic items presented material critical to solving a test item. For such items, fuzzy or grainy illustrations can prevent students from answering the item correctly. These problems were exacerbated by ditto copying or xeroxing.

This discussion of layout has focused on the worst third of the tests. About 25 percent looked professionally prepared, and another 40 percent of the tests were certainly adequate. It should also be noted that the tests submitted for this study were often field test versions that would have been revised again before used as a final assessment. Although layout is an important feature for any test, it is relatively easy to remedy with technical and graphic assistance and resources.

Test Length

Test length is determined by the number of items and/or the time limits for administration. The number of test items (for the three content areas) in this study ranged from 52 to 392. Most tests averaged either 120 to 150 items or 200 to 250 items. This bimodal distribution was due to the presence or absence of objective writing tests. Test length was obviously related to the time limit given to students for completing the test. Most districts did not report time limits. For those which did report on test length, there was a sizeable range (from three class periods to about seven hours).

Administrative Directions

Instructions to students on how to take the proficiency test varied from no directions to relatively complete directions, including sample items and information on test-taking skills. About one-fourth of the proficiency tests had general directions to students about how to take the tests. One-fourth of the tests gave directions for each type of item but did not provide general instructions. One-third gave general directions for item types and included sample items.

Very few of the directions in the proficiency tests included for the students a statement of the purpose and importance of the tests. This information, however, may have been given in the oral directions presented by the test administrator. About 10 percent of the submitted tests provided test-taking clues to students, along with general instructions and sample items. These clues reminded students to check their answers and to erase stray marks, and the clues let them know that no penalty would be made for guessing.

Cultural Bias

Reviewing test items for cultural bias is important in minimizing differential student performance based on sexual, cultural, or racial differences. The following information on reviews for test bias comes from the Implementation Substudy, described in Chapter 3.

Only half of the responding districts in the Implementation Substudy reported examining their proficiency tests for cultural bias. When such procedures were used, districts reviewed the item content (45 percent), revised the tests on the basis of field test data (35 percent), and/or asked experts to review the tests for bias (22 percent).

Districts that had not conducted test bias reviews cited the following reasons: the student population was essentially homogeneous; commerical and consortium tests did not require bias reviews; test bias reviews are unnecessary; they had planned to, but hadn't yet; or they didn't know how.

Chapter 3
Implementation

In the second part of this study, districts were asked questions about a variety of implementation activities. These will be reported as follows:

1. Notice to parents
2. Notice to, and involvement of, teachers
3. Impact of proficiency assessment on curriculum and instruction
4. Effects on students
5. Conferences
6. Remedial instruction
7. Relationship with categorical programs
8. Policies for special education students

The information in this chapter is based on two data sources. The first data source is a summary of the responses to a questionnaire sent to a representative sample of districts within California. The second source of data comes from 15 case study districts. Because this was not a representative sample of districts, the findings from the second source are not generalizable.

Notice to Parents About Proficiency Assessment

The Pupil Proficiency Law and notions of fairness towards students, as pointed out in the Debra P. v. Turlington[1] decision, require that written notice of basic skills assessment be given to the student and to the student's parent or guardian.

Questionnaire findings: In the Implementation Substudy, districts were asked when the information was reported to parents, how it was transmitted, and what information was transmitted. Tables 11, 12, and 13 give this information for districts maintaining high schools.

Table 11 shows that only one-fourth of the responding districts notified parents prior to 1978, which was about one year after the first proficiency law was passed. Although it could take a year to develop proficiency standards and gain community input and consensus regarding those standards, the spectre of legal challenge on the grounds of due process makes the date of parent and student notification important. Notification of parents prior to 1976 could only have occurred in districts that were "ahead" of the law, that is to say, where proficiency assessment had already begun.

Districts provided parents with information about grade levels to be tested and conference and remediation requirements as well as lists of proficiency statements. Several districts mentioned "other" information given to parents and teachers. These included: passing score information and district retention policies, as well as information that is not directly related to proficiency assessment, including Stull Bill requirements and district discipline policies.

[1] No. 78-892 (iv.-T-H CM/D. Fla. decision 7-12-79), 48 L. W. 2058C-24-79.

TABLE 11

WHEN PARENTS WERE NOTIFIED

Year parents were first notified about proficiency testing	Percent of responding districts* (n=64)
1971	2%
1974	2
1976	5
1977	15
1978	51
1979	25

*High school and unified

TABLE 12

WHAT INFORMATION WAS PROVIDED TO PARENTS

Type of information	Percent of responding districts* (n=67)
Copies of proficiency statements	75%
Grade levels to be tested and when	93
Skill or competency description (item specification)	49
Conferencing procedures	79
Remediation requirements	78

*High school and unified

TABLE 13

HOW PARENTS WERE NOTIFIED

Means	Percent of responding districts* (n=67)
Mail	73%
Meetings	63
Posted notice	22
School newspaper	52
Public newspaper	84
Individual conferences	57

*High school and unified

The data in Table 13 show that districts were using multiple means to notify parents. Twelve respondents indicated other ways of notifying parents, including letters, brochures, handbooks or newsletters sent home, Saturday and evening meetings, and radio and television spots.

Case-Study findings: Case-Study districts were asked about parent notification procedures. Two aspects of the notification process deserve attention. First, while districts had taken elaborate steps to notify parents of the proficiency requirements, there was no assurance that parents understood the importance of such notices. One indication of this was the small number of parents attending informational meetings focusing on proficiency requirements. Commenting on notification, one superintendent said, "We have done just about everything, from informing here at the school to lots of events for the community. Kids know about the law, but the community just doesn't show up for these things."

Second, cost was a heavy burden for districts trying to be conscientious about notification. As pointed out in interviews with staff, the cost to individual schools for notifying parents in large urban districts was excessive. Principals notified parents in advisory council meetings about tests, pass-fail rates, and remediation plans. Schools with high proportions of Spanish-speaking parents often translated the proficiency notices. Costs for translation, duplication, and mailing were met by individual schools.

Notice to, and Involvement of, Teachers

Teachers had a major influence on the integration of proficiency assessment into the curriculum and instructional program.

Questionnaire findings: In the Implementation Substudy, districts were asked how and when teachers were notified of the proficiency requirements and what information was given to them. Table 14 reports the approximate date when teachers were notified.

TABLE 14

WHEN TEACHERS WERE NOTIFIED ABOUT PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

Year of notification	Percent of districts responding	
	High school/ unified (n=67)	Elementary (n=34)
1972	2%	0%
1973	2	0
1976	6	4
1977	18	4
1978	58	36
1979	15	57

The data indicate that, like parents, teachers were notified primarily in 1978 and 1979. Districts that notified teachers prior to 1976 were involved in basic skills testing before the proficiency laws were passed. It is not surprising that elementary districts notified staff in 1978 and 1979, as elementary districts were not required to implement proficiency assessment until 1978.

The information reported to teachers and the methods of transmittal are reported in Tables 15 and 16. These data show that most districts gave teachers several kinds of information. As noted previously, the study did not investigate the quality or content of the information provided. For example, as indicated earlier in the Measures Substudy, districts used the term item specifications to mean many things.

TABLE 15

WHAT INFORMATION WAS PROVIDED TO TEACHERS

Type of information	Percent of districts responding	
	High school and unified (n=67)	Elementary (n=34)
Copies of proficiency/competency statements	96%	97%
Grade levels to be tested and when	100	91
Skill or competency descriptions (item specifications)	84	77
Conferencing procedures	79	68
Remediation requirements	88	59
Other	10	5

TABLE 16

HOW TEACHERS WERE NOTIFIED

Mode of transmittal	Percent of districts responding (n=100)
Mail	12%
Meetings	94
Posted notice	29
School newspaper	47
Public newspaper	54
Individual conferences	30
Other	13

In almost all cases teachers were notified of proficiency assessment at meetings. Other means, such as newspapers and conferences, were used to notify teachers.

Teacher knowledge of, and familiarity with, proficiency assessment is increased by involvement in test development. Areas of reported teacher involvement are indicated in Table 17.

TABLE 17

TEACHER INVOLVEMENT IN TEST DEVELOPMENT

Type of involvement	Percent of districts responding (n=104)
Generating proficiency statements	89%
Writing item specifications	70
Writing test items	82
Field testing	88
Setting passing scores	83
Other	10

Teachers were reported to have been involved in all aspects of test development. Other areas of involvement cited were: working with outside consultants, selecting instruments, developing conference and recordkeeping procedures, developing remedial programs, and reviewing test results.

Case-Study findings: The data for teacher involvement do not reflect the number or extent of teacher involvement in a given district activity. In one of the case studies, it was pointed out that while all teachers were given numerous opportunities to become involved at various stages of test development, most chose not to participate in any formal way. In another case, that of a large high school district, math and English department leaders from each school did early test development work. The district office arranged for them to meet monthly, preparing item specifications first and then the items themselves.

Impact of Proficiency Assessment on Curriculum and Instruction

As an integrated part of the regular program, proficiency assessment has an impact on curriculum and instruction.

Questionnaire findings: Survey respondents were asked to rate the impact of proficiency assessment on curriculum and instruction in their districts (responses are presented in Table 18). These responses reflect the perceptions of district-level staff who might not have had direct knowledge of curriculum effects in schools.

TABLE 18

IMPACT OF PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT ON
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Level of impact	Percent of districts responding		
	All (n=99)	Elementary (n=33)	High school and unified (n=68)
1. Significant	33%	15%	42%
2. Marginal	53	46	56
3. No effect	14	39	2

High school and unified districts reported that proficiency assessment had a significant effect on curriculum and instruction to a greater extent than it did in elementary districts. This may have been the result of earlier implementation requirements for secondary schools and the greater basic skills orientation of elementary schools. Size could also have been a factor in the degree of impact. Larger high school and unified districts were more likely than small ones to report a significant impact, possibly because proficiencies represent standardization of curriculum across many schools. Only 21 percent of the small high school and unified districts reported a significant impact, whereas 59 percent of high school and unified districts with populations of 10,000 or more reported significant impact.

Respondents were asked to indicate what kinds of curricular and instructional changes had occurred because of proficiency assessment. Their responses are presented in Table 19.

TABLE 19

CURRICULAR AND INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGES
REFLECTING PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS

Type of change	Percent of districts responding		
	High school (n=29)	Unified (n=40)	Elementary (n=34)
a. Revision of curriculum materials by district staff	69%	65%	32%
b. Development of new materials by district staff	57	73	29
c Revision of curriculum materials by publisher	7	15	3
d. Reassignment of teaching staff	52	68	3
e. More time devoted to teaching basic skills or remediation	93	90	44
f. Modification of teaching methods	55	75	38
g. Addition of new courses	69	70	18
h. Other	21	15	11

According to district-level respondents, the most frequently cited effect on curriculum and instruction was more time being devoted to remediation and teaching basic skills (93 percent). Sixty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that new courses had been added and curriculum materials had been revised. New courses included "Math Essentials," "Consumer Math," and "Survival English." Additional program changes included activity centers and learning labs, changed sequence of instruction, more individualized instruction, summer school, smaller classes, and parent-as-tutor learning packets.

Case-Study findings: In several Case-Study districts, the cost of instruction in basic skills came at the expense of an enriched curriculum and previously offered electives. A central office staff respondent in a large high school district questioned the trade-offs:

> We know that large numbers of kids don't write well, and if somebody told you, 'Make them write well,' what would it take? What the public is going to have to face is that you're turning the public schools into remedial factories. I don't quarrel with that as long as everybody understands that we have to give up other things to do that. Now our critics out there will say, 'Get back to basics where you should be; you're giving up frills.' But that word frill is something else to other people. It's not a frill to those parents who can't have their kids taught calculus anymore.

A side effect of this orientation toward basic skills teaching and the reassignment of staff is the negative effect on teacher morale of teaching primarily remedial courses. Several English and math teachers and department leaders indicated that teacher morale was low regarding proficiency assessment, because they were no longer teaching subjects which were challenging and interesting; rather, they were forced to teach "basic" subjects which properly belonged in the elementary grades. To the extent that high schools are forced to "do the elementary schools' job," teachers felt that the proficiency assessment effort was misplaced.

Questionnaire findings: Respondents were asked what their districts were doing "to ensure that specific proficiency skills are included in classroom instruction in the ways in which they are tested." (A term commonly used to describe match between what is taught and what is tested is linkage.) Almost 90 percent of the questionnaires included some description of linkage activities. The responses were categorized into three types of effort mentioned: (1) provision of information to teachers; (2) involvement of teachers in the proficiency implementation process; and (3) review or modification of curriculum.

Two-thirds of the districts ensure linkage by providing information to teachers; nearly one-half report that materials have been modified to reflect the proficiencies; and a smaller number actually involved teachers in various aspects of testing (see Table 20).

The open-ended responses to the question on linkage varied widely in terms of the specificity and extensiveness of efforts cited; the following examples characterize this variation:

Example 1. Teachers have been given lists of skills tested and sample test items.

TABLE 20

DISTRICT ACTIVITIES TO ENSURE MATCH
BETWEEN TEST AND CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Activities	Percent of districts	Percent of districts reporting this category as only activity
CATEGORY I. Providing information in various forms to teachers	66%	35%
- Proficiency statements		
- Test descriptions		
- Item specifications		
- Sample items		
- Practice items		
- Student outcome data by item and area		
- Scope and sequence listings		
- Matrix of skills and instructional units		
- Grading criteria (scoring)		
- Materials for review: basic skills packets, remediation kits, etc.		
- In-service opportunities to share and learn about proficiencies and remediation		
CATEGORY II. Involving teachers	16	6
- Test development, selection, or revision		
- Administering and scoring tests		
- Developing scope and sequence guides		
- Taking tests		
- Using scoring criteria in instruction (rubrics)		
- Reporting on skills covered in courses		
CATEGORY III. Teachers developing, modifying, or obtaining materials	45	17
- Curriculum guides, articulation guides		
- Scope and sequence/matrix/continua of curriculum		
- Course materials and instructional aids; practice tests, home use packets, etc.		

Example 2. Teachers compiled materials for tests--and received in-service training.

Example 3. Teachers helped develop tests and received copies of remediation packets, manuals, and other descriptive materials. Also, the English curriculum has been revised for grades seven-ten. A scope and sequence has been developed in reading and math.

Linking what is tested with what is taught may require greater effort for districts assessing functional transfer or "life skills" which have not traditionally been part of the school curriculum. Respondents were asked in the Implementation Substudy to report on the relative emphasis of school skills and life skills in their proficiency test and curriculum. Thirty-nine percent of the responding districts reported assessing primarily school skills; only 15 percent reported assessing primarily life skills. A larger number (47 percent) reported assessing a combination of life and school skills.

High school districts which reported a balance of "life skills" with "school skills" or primarily "life skills" were asked to assess the presence of these skills in their curricular/instructional program:

1. Only one district reported little or no emphasis on "life skills" in the curriculum/instructional program.

2. Thirty-five districts (67 percent) reported that the life skills they tested had always been in their curricular/instructional program.

3. Sixteen districts (31 percent) reported that most of the life skills had been added to the curriculum/instructional program since the proficiencies were adopted.

Integrating proficiency assessment into the regular program is a significant aspect of the implementation process but is difficult to describe without substantial school-level analysis, which was beyond the scope of this study.

Effects on Students

Four attempts were made in the current study to collect student performance data on the 1978-79 district proficiency tests. In the Measures Substudy, districts were asked to report the percent of the class of 1981 who passed the 1978-79 test. In the Implementation Substudy, districts were asked to report the number of students failing the 1978-79 proficiency test and the number of students receiving supplementary instruction. Central office staff interviewed in Case-Study districts were asked to report grade levels of test administration and passing rates, by subject area for all students, special education students, and racial and linguistic minority students. A final attempt to collect data consisted of a phone call follow-up to all 15 Case-Study districts.

Separately or in total, the results of these four data collection efforts do not provide an accurate picture of pupil performance on the proficiency tests. The Department of Education's efforts were confounded by districts' reluctance to respond to its requests for such data and by their inability to provide complete

data for student populations and subgroups. The following data, in the Department's judgment, give the most accurate portrayal available of student performance.

Measures Substudy findings: Only 69 percent of the high school and unified districts in the sample provided information on 1978-79 passing rates.

TABLE 21

PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN CLASS OF 1981
PASSING 78-79 PROFICIENCY TEST

Percent of class of 1981 passing	Percent of high school and unified districts responding (n=64)
90-100%	3%
80-89	24
70-79	23
60-69	19
Less than 60	31

The percent of districts failing large numbers of students makes Table 21 appear quite alarming, especially when compared to the percent of expected ultimate failures taken from the 1979 study (an estimated 7.8 percent of the 1981 seniors would not graduate). But other considerations mitigate against the interpretation that "too many" students are failing the proficiency test. First, the 1979 estimate may still be accurate; the 1978-79 testing was a preliminary assessment, the results of which may change in the second assessment. Second, the test instruments and/or the passing scores may be revised for subsequent assessments given new information about students' real ability levels. Third, district remediation efforts are now underway that may assist students in passing the part of the test they failed earlier. The paucity of data about percent passing and the fact that the data are based on an interim assessment combine to make these data less compelling for state level policymakers. Percent passing is a subject for within-district analysis, both by school and subpopulations.

Implementation Substudy findings: In the Implementation Substudy, districts were asked to report the number of secondary students failing the 1978-79 proficiency test, the number of students receiving supplementary instruction, and the percent of students in remedial programs who qualified for Title I or LES/NES services.

While 67 districts maintaining high schools responded to the question (93 percent), the lack of a common recordkeeping system made the responses impossible to interpret. Districts varied in how they kept pass-fail information, and whether or not performance records are maintained for population subgroups. Some districts reported scores by grade level and subject area for individual

population subgroups in the district. Others reported only percent passing for the total population tested. Therefore, data from the Implementation Substudy are not reported here, as it was unreasonable to create a single standard of measure for summarizing the various ways in which districts reported failure rates.

Case-Study findings: In an effort to get more solid information on student performance, letters and follow-up phone calls were made to the 15 Case-Study districts. All 15 districts reported overall passing rates that summarized the results for their students. Three districts reported pass-fail rates by population subgroups (Tables 22, 23, 24, and 25). The data in these tables do not represent generalizable patterns across the state. The mere fact that these districts collect such data make them anomalies.

Administrators in several urban districts with large numbers of minority students expressed concern about differential student performance on district proficiency tests. Many districts were particularly concerned about having disproportionate numbers of minority students fail the tests. District administrators felt that it was too early to tell about effects on students; yet, when queried about minority students, these administrators acknowledged that minority students were not likely to do as well on the test as the general student population.

As part of site visits, one classroom of students in each school was given a questionnaire about student knowledge and experience with proficiency assessment (n=413). Since the classrooms were selected by school staff, this was a sample of convenience and is in no way a true cross section of California students. Responses to the questionnaire indicate that almost all of the students knew they had to pass proficiency tests to graduate from high school (96 percent). Asked how they had been notified, students responded:

- A letter had been sent home (20 percent).
- The principal or counselor made a school announcement (48 percent).
- There was an assembly or school meeting (nine percent).
- Other notification procedures had been used (15 percent).
- Did not remember (21 percent).

Students from Case-Study schools knew the following information about the proficiency tests:

- What subjects were covered on the test (75 percent)
- The kinds of questions that were on the test (33 percent)
- The passing score (25 percent)
- When the tests were given (18 percent)
- Other information (three percent)
- Were not given any information about the tests (15 percent)

When asked how teachers had helped them prepare for the tests, students answered that:

- Teachers talked about the kinds of things "asked on the test" (37 percent).
- They reviewed basic skills (47 percent).
- They talked about how to pass the proficiency tests (19 percent).
- They "did other things" (three percent).

TABLE 22

PUPIL PASSING RATES ON 1978-79
PROFICIENCY TEST: CASE-STUDY DISTRICT A

Ethnicity (enrollment, 900)	Percent passing			
	Reading comprehension (combined grades 9-10)	Writing	Computation	Total test
All students	83%	20%	52%	11%
White*	-	-	-	-
Ethnic minorities:				
Black	82	13	33	0
Hispanic	73	22	42	0
American Indian*	-	-	-	-
Asian*	-	-	-	-
All others*	-	-	-	-
LES/NES	30	0	26	0
Special Education	-	-	-	-

*Data were not provided.

TABLE 23

PUPIL PASSING RATES ON 1978-79
PROFICIENCY TEST: CASE-STUDY DISTRICT B

Ethnicity (K-12 enrollment, 10,000)	Percent passing			
	Reading comprehension (combined) grades 9-10)	Writing	Computation	Total test
All students	74%	47%	43%	32%
White*	-	-	-	-
Ethnic minorities:				
Black	48	11	14	05
Hispanic	48	23	20	15
American Indian*	-	-	-	-
Asian	90	75	60	50
All others	50	10	10	10
LES/NES	30	10	10	5
Special Education	60	40	40	30

*Data were not provided.

TABLE 24

PUPIL PASSING RATES ON 1978-79
PROFICIENCY TEST: CASE-STUDY DISTRICT C

Ethnicity (K-12 enrollment, 37,000)	Percent passing, by subject and grade					
	Reading comprehension		Writing		Computation	
	Nine	Ten	Nine	Ten	Nine	Ten
All students	75%	81%	61%	70%	29%	41%
White	86	90	71	80	39	53
Ethnic minorities:						
Black	61	65	49	57	13	20
Hispanic	64	73	48	56	19	29
Asian	76	83	70	80	45	57
American Indian	70	75	49	58	18	37
All others						
LES/NES*	-	-	-	-	-	-
Special Education*	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Data were not provided.

TABLE 25

PUPIL PASSING RATES ON 1978-79
PROFICIENCY TEST: SAMPLE DISTRICT*

Ethnicity (enrollment, 4,000)	Percent passing, by subject and grade					
	Reading comprehension		Writing		Computation	
	Nine	Ten	Nine	Ten	Nine	Ten
All students	71%	78%	71%	77%	77%	84%
White**	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ethnic minorities:						
Black	54	37	57	40	34	30
Hispanic	47	56	50	50	40	50
Asian**	-	-	-	-	-	-
American Indian**	-	-	-	-	-	-
All others**	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other	78	85	75	85	88	95
LES/NES**	-	-	-	-	-	-
Special Education**	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Table 25 is one more example of a district's subgroup passing scores and is taken from a mailout request conducted by Stephen Rosenzweig, CRLA attorney. This table appears in an unpublished mimeographed report, "California Proficiency Assessment: A Call for Reconsideration," p. 3. In conversation with Mr. Rosenzweig, it was learned that his mailout to more than 100 districts also generated very few responses.

**Data were not provided.

Thirty-seven percent of the responding students had received no special help from their teachers to prepare them to take the test.

Students knew what would happen to those who failed the proficiency tests. They reported their classmates who failed would:

- Take the test again (60 percent).
- Attend conferences to discuss test scores and next steps (14 percent).
- Take a special course or do extra work (33 percent).
- Did not know (24 percent).

In the classes sampled, 88 percent of the eleventh graders had taken the proficiency tests (78 percent reading, 81 percent math, and 65 percent writing). Most students (75 percent) felt that the test was about the "right" degree of difficulty; the remainder (25 percent) was evenly divided between evaluating the test as "too hard" or "too easy." Of the 365 students who took the proficiency tests, 67 failed one or more parts. These 67 students responded to two questions about remediation activities. Regarding their choice of "special work," two-thirds reported that they were assigned to a remediation activity, and one-third actually participated in choosing the remedial work. Students perceived that the remediation classes were beneficial, as 37 percent found them very useful, 48 percent thought they were somewhat useful, and 15 percent reported the remediation work was not useful.

Questionnaire findings: Particular concern was raised by the legislative subcommittee about the relationship between proficiency assessment and the student drop-out rate. While districts maintained records of nonreturning students and seniors who did not graduate, no data were available about student motivation for dropping out. District perceptions about the influence of proficiency assessment on the drop-out rate were surveyed in the Implementation Substudy. Table 26 reports administrators' perceptions of the effect of proficiency assessment on the drop-out rate.

TABLE 26

ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECT OF PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS ON DROP-OUT RATE

Effect on drop-out rate	Percent of all responding districts (n=87)	Percent of districts responding, by size of enrollment		
		Low	Medium (n=87)	High
Increase	37%	25%	14%	46%
No effect	66	71	74	46
Decrease	8	4	12	8

Most district administrators did not anticipate an increase in the drop-out rate as a result of proficiency assessment. Administrators in large urban districts anticipated a greater effect than those in smaller districts did. Caution must be taken in viewing these data, because Case-Study administrators reported difficulty in pinning down actual numbers and reasons for dropping out of school.

In summary, no comparative data were available on pupil performance on district proficiency tests. While districts maintained performance records, incongruities among local recordkeeping systems and political sensitivity prevented the Department from generating a single pass-fail rate. Case-Study reports suggested that minority students were not doing as well as majority students, but these findings were limited to cases. Further, inconsistencies across schools within districts suggested the need for more focused analysis of within-district variations.

Conferences with Parents

One of the provisions of the proficiency legislation requires a parent conference for those students who fail to meet the district adopted standards. This conference requirement raises the issue of timely notification to parents about their child's failure so that the remediation plans developed at the conference will immediately affect the student's instructional program. Another related problem is getting the parents to attend the conference once they receive notice of it. The law requires that the student's parent/guardian be requested in writing to attend the conference. (The law further stipulates that if the parent or guardian does not respond, the school is required to make a "reasonable effort" to contact him or her by other means.)

Questionnaire findings: The Implementation Substudy attempted to determine when the test results had been communicated to the parents, and the substudy also posed questions about parent attendance at conferences. Districts were asked, "How long after administering proficiency tests are results communicated to parents of students who fail the proficiency test?" More than three-fourths of the districts maintaining high schools reported that test results were available to parents less than three months after the tests were administered.

The districts were also asked in the Implementation Survey to report the percent of parents of tenth grade students who did not appear for conferences. Fifty-eight high school or unified districts (60 percent) responded to the question. Twenty-eight percent of these indicated that conferences had not been held. Nineteen percent reported that from none to one-fourth of the parents of tenth graders had not appeared. Fourteen percent of the districts reported that from one-quarter to one-half of the parents had not appeared. Another 14 percent reported that from one-half to three-fourths of the parents had not appeared. Finally, 11 percent of the districts reported that more than 75 percent of the parents had not appeared for conferences. Parent attendance in the 39 districts reporting varied widely, according to reports from district staff.

Case-Study findings: The purpose of the proficiency assessment conference is to design a remedial program for the student. In order to obtain information about district conference experiences, Case-Study districts were asked about their approaches and procedures to holding conferences:

> Use of individual conferences. In one large urban district, conferences at the high school were arranged and conducted by the counseling staff on an individual basis. Letters were sent home to the parents of the 80 students that had not passed. A follow-up letter was sent by registered mail informing parents of the need to set up an appointment. Individual conferences centered on the test results and the remediation options available.

Use of group conferences, with option for individual conference. One school in a large urban unified district held both group and individual conferences. During the group conference, parents were informed of remediation opportunities for students and were told about the diagnostic information available from test publishers. Individual conferences were conducted by the counseling staff for students failing the proficiency test. In the individual sessions, counselors covered the diagnostic information on the student's printout and designed an instructional program to help build student skills.

Use of group conferences. Group conferences were set up in one small rural district for students who had not passed one or more of the proficiency tests. Parents of students who were not making sufficient progress were invited to an evening meeting. After a general overview of the law and the remedial program, the group was divided into three small groups by subject matter area in which the student failed. In the small groups a remedial teacher went over skill areas assessed, how the student would be reassessed, and what would happen if the student did not pass a second time.

Arranging and conducting conferences were reported to be major logistical problems by several Case-Study districts. One counselor estimated that he had spent a week processing paperwork for proficiency assessment during which time he saw no students. Another counselor in a large high school in the same district who oversees the entire proficiency testing program said that he had spent six weeks of 60 hours per week on logistics and paperwork because the school has no computer facility. He entered 2,500 scores by hand and set up a special schedule of testing when the regular schedule did not permit a period long enough for test administration. The major reshuffling of schedules to administer tests and arrange conferences was and continues to be a problem in that school.

In another district at a school where the population was predominantly Hispanic, conducting conferences was "not a major goal," according to the principal. The school sent one invitation to parents of students that had failed and was not planning any follow-up. The principal explained that this school had other priorities and would organize a comprehensive plan for conferences next year when he felt conferences would become more critical. However, another school in the same district with a very large black population made a vigorous attempt to bring parents in for conferences. The school had three documented mailouts of invitations, and between 15 and 20 percent of the parents had attended conferences.

Remedial Instruction

This study looked at district organization of supplementary or remedial instruction. As 1978-79 was the first year when proficiency assessment remediation was provided, descriptive information was sought about who was responsible and what types of programs were provided. Structured interviews with principals, department heads, and remediation teachers in Case-Study districts raised other issues, including types of responsibility, addition of new courses, student entry, course content, and summer school.

Questionnaire findings: Districts were asked in the Implementation Substudy about primary responsibility for remediation programs, differences among schools' remediation programs, and the types of programs provided.

TABLE 27

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT REMEDIAL PROGRAMS

Responsibilities	Staff responsible, by percent of responding districts (n=93)	
	Central office staff	School-level staff
Organization of classes	12%	88%
Content of classes	15	85
Selection of students	9	91
Assignment of personnel	20	80

One important and unexpected finding is indicated by the data in Table 27. Although the law speaks of district responsibility in implementing a proficiency assessment program, it was found that school-level staff were primarily responsible for remediation programs in most reporting districts. Large high school and unified districts reported that the central office had responsibility for remediation programs more often than the central office did in elementary or smaller districts--except in the assignment of personnel. Small districts were more likely to rely on the central office to provide staff for remedial classes (29 percent of small districts versus 15 percent of large districts).

On the other hand, central office staff from 73 districts (68 percent) indicated that remedial programs were the same for all schools. Differences which were cited among schools included: learning centers versus individualized learning programs, separate remedial classes versus remedial instruction embedded in regular classes, and differing availability of resources and tutors. The reasons cited for these differences were: local needs, varying failure rates, and influence of compensatory education programs.

Case-Study findings: District allocation of responsibility to the school-level was also evident in the areas of recordkeeping, notifying parents, and conducting conferences with parents and students. Curriculum specialists in one large urban district participated in test development, provided teachers with in-service help on instructional linkage, and developed remediation packages based on the 7-12 curriculum continuum. These materials had standardized the content of remedial courses throughout the district. However, each school had its own plan for providing students with remedial assistance. In one school, the regular staff operated a learning lab for tutoring and remediation where students worked on remedial instruction materials developed by the central office staff.

Questionnaire findings: Almost all (96 percent) districts reported using regular classroom programs for remediation. Other types of remediation included special pull-out programs (59 percent), after school programs (25 percent), summer school programs (41 percent), and tutorial programs (67 percent). Fifteen percent of the districts reported using some type of remediation program other than the ones listed above, such as basic skills labs, independent study, Saturday school, and Upward Bound. Elementary districts, large districts, and less

affluent districts seemed more inclined to use pull-out programs. Elementary districts rarely used (17 percent) after school or summer school programs for remediation due to proficiency testing.

Case-Study findings: Case-Study districts reported using regular classroom programs, pull-out tutorial programs, and summer school for remediation. Several Case-Study districts reported that individual schools had multiple offerings for remediation. Courses had been redesigned to emphasize the proficiencies as they were covered in the test. This was especially true in consumer math, composition, and sophomore English.

Several Case-Study districts reported creating new courses to meet proficiency remediation needs. In one large urban high school, 26 out of 46 math classes were remedial. Providing these courses has had a major impact on the school's elective courses. Regular classroom teachers had been reassigned to teach remediation.

Most districts were not running highly centralized remediation programs but were instead leaving supplementary instruction primarily to individual schools. Responsibility for remediation devolved primarily upon building principals and teachers. Despite this, districts' coordinators perceived that programs were generally similar across schools within a given district.

Relationship with Categorical Programs

Categorical programs provide compensatory education for socially and economically disadvantaged students and linguistic minority students. Federal and state dollars are targeted to schools among eligible areas having high concentrations of low-income families. These programs include Title I/EDY and bilingual education.

Remediation necessary for a student to meet proficiency assessment requirements is not specifically funded by categorical programs. However, like compensatory education, remediation programs to meet proficiency assessment requirements provide supplementary instruction in the basic skills. And, it may be assumed, many students in need of remediation for proficiency assessment purposes are also served in compensatory education programs. The Department of Education's data suggest that most districts are not keeping track of categorical program eligibility of students failing district proficiency tests.

Questionnaire findings: In the Implementation Substudy, districts were asked to report the percent of students in remediation programs who also qualified for Title I/EDY or LES/NES services. The fact that only 29 districts responded and that their responses were inconsistent make these data impossible to summarize and report. Districts were also asked to report on whether proficiency requirements had influenced bilingual programs. Approximately one-third of the 92 responding districts that maintain high schools reported that proficiency assessment had influenced the bilingual instruction provided in their districts. These were large districts (a.d.a. of 10,000 or more), which tended to have higher percentages of limited-English-speaking students. Sixty-six percent of the responding districts reported no effect.

Case-Study findings: Interviews in Case-Study districts revealed complex issues in the relationship between the remedial instruction needed by students to meet proficiency assessment and the categorical programs provided for students with special needs.

Administrators in Case-Study districts were at once both reluctant to acknowledge the overlap of remedial instruction for proficiency assessment with categorical programs, and yet honest about how Title I/EDY funds were being used. Several district administrators felt that total overlap existed between remediation for meeting proficiency assessment requirements and existing services for students with special needs. In one small rural district, Title I/EDY funds were being used in a remedial reading program, which existed side-by-side with "proficiency skills courses."

In another district, the school with Title I funds had a variety of supplementary instruction programs, including special courses, small group settings, and labs with tutors. Another school in the same district without Title I funds used only large-group instruction within regular classes for remediation to meet proficiency assessment requirements. Still another district used Title I funds to hire a new teacher who was responsible for pull-out reading and mathematics instruction for proficiency assessment.

Districts in the study were approaching the use of categorical funds for proficiency assessment cautiously. The low questionnaire response rate and Case-Study information suggest confusion about the interplay between state and federal laws. For example, districts were not sure whether they could use a Title I teacher in basic skill classes for students who had failed the district's proficiency test.

Policies for Special Education Students

The proficiency requirements do not exempt students in special education. However, district governing boards are given the option of providing students in special education programs with a "differential standard." Where provided, the differential standard is to be included in the student's IEP (individualized education program).

Questionnaire findings: In the Implementation Substudy, districts were asked to report whether or not the local governing board had elected to provide differential standards for special education students. As reported in Table 28, most districts were providing differential standards for students in special education.

Case-Study findings: Case-Study districts reported mixed approaches to proficiency assessment of special education students. Several districts provided differential standards on an individual basis. In two other cases, special education students were given the opportunity to take the regular proficiency test. In these districts, if it was clear that the student would not be able to master the regular proficiencies, individual standards were written into the IEP. In yet another Case-Study district, the resource specialist was working exclusively on proficiency assessment activities with special education students. Case-Study districts operating under the state Master Plan for Special Education reported

that the proficiency requirements and Master Plan programs facilitated the differential standards process. Special education staff raised the following concerns about the relationship between proficiency assessment and special education: (1) that the number of diagnostic assessments will rise sharply; (2) that placement in special education programs will be a loophole for nonproficient students; and (3) that the current definitions for specific special education programs will become distorted.

TABLE 28

ADOPTION OF DIFFERENTIAL STANDARDS

Board decision	Percent of responding districts maintaining high schools (n=67)
Differential standards provided (58%):	
- On an individual basis	46%
- By disability category	12
Not provided	13
Not yet considered	23
Other	6

Chapter 4
Case Studies

Department of Education representatives visited 15 districts in the fall of 1979 to gather more in-depth information about implementation efforts. A set of interviews was prepared and used for the third phase of this study. Interviewers then wrote detailed vignettes of individual site visits (see the methodology chapter for more information). Two of the vignettes, selected because of differences in the size and locale of the districts, are presented here as examples of districts' approaches to proficiency assessment. These two case studies are not intended to represent all districts in the state, but rather to document the different experiences and problems encountered by two very different districts.

Case Study One--Unified District in Urban Area

This unified school district of approximately 10,000 students is located in an urban area. The district has a 7.5 percent minority student population, the percent of aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) is mid-range, and there is a sizable LES/NES population and a 75 percent transiency rate. In the past three to four years, the district has undergone a number of important changes: integration, a new superintendent, and declining enrollment with its attendant effects of staff layoffs and teacher reassignments.

On the whole, district personnel supported the proficiency law and were implementing it conscientiously. The district was going beyond the statutory requirements for proficiency assessment in math, reading, and writing by adopting proficiency standards in social studies (and eventually in natural sciences). Along with the state proficiency requirements, the superintendent and board had mandated a districtwide competency-based education system covering the whole curriculum. Many district staff considered this additional mandate as too much too soon, and the additional requirements had resulted in strained relations between the central office staff and the superintendent, as well as between the teachers and the superintendent. The central office staff found itself caught carrying out board policy, yet feeling little ownership of, or even philosophical agreement with, the district mandate. It was difficult, therefore, for those interviewed to focus on the state-mandated proficiency requirements independently of this otherwise stressful context.

Governance

The director of curricular services was a central figure in the implementation of the proficiency requirements--from test development to scoring, reporting results, holding conferences, and notification. Early in the implementation process, he took a course in proficiency test development and worked with district committees to develop proficiency tests in each subject area. All schools were invited to participate on these district committees: in math, three schools were represented; in English, all five high schools were represented. Tests in math, reading, and writing were then passed on to the district curricular coordinating committees, which had teacher representatives from all schools. Though organized by the central office, there was plenty of opportunity for staff involvement, communication, feedback, test revision, and, most importantly, a real

sense of staff ownership. Those involved felt good about the process and felt proud of the results. Community and board reactions were that the standards of proficiency were too low. The director of curricular services responded that the community simply did not have a realistic idea of what the schools could and could not do. Schools, in his view, simply do not have the sophistication to bring all students up to higher levels of proficiency, particularly in a district of this type.

Notification, reporting of test results, and conferences were all handled from the central office. Testing was conducted in the spring. Last spring within a month of testing, letters were sent to all parents restating the requirements of the law and including a computer printout of students' performance in each subject area by subtest and by objective. In this letter, an invitation was extended to all parents to attend a meeting at their child's school to learn more about proficiency requirements and the remediation available for students who failed. At each school, approximately four families of failing students appeared for this meeting.

Neither of the two principals interviewed had been involved in these steps before; however, both had attended the school group conferences. By and large, implementation of proficiency at the school level had been delegated to an assistant principal or the department heads. A large part of the work load at the school level was making sure students took the tests when they were offered and ensuring that those needing remediation got placed in appropriate classes. The director for curricular services felt that the process used in this district had successfully generated a feeling of staff ownership while at the same time protecting the school (department heads and teachers) from the logistical burdens of scoring, reporting results, holding conferences, and the like. With the district office shouldering the major portion of implementation responsibility, it was hoped that the schools could concentrate on instruction.

Curriculum and Instruction

Proficiency standards in this district were derived largely from the curriculum. Even before the proficiency law had been signed, the district had begun a serious "back-to-basics" effort. Therefore, proficiency assessment was not an add-on, although it necessarily imposed an accelerated time frame. The math department reported that, essentially, it had always been competency-based--the overlap or linkage between curriculum and proficiency standards being complete from the start. All those interviewed in the English department agreed that there had definitely been more attention given to specifying the curricular and instructional relationship to test content (linkage). The development of the district's writing packet for students and teachers was an exemplary product of the effort to establish linkage. All agreed, though, that establishing instructional validity (determining if teachers were covering proficiency test content) was a major problem, which was likely to get worse as teachers were reassigned because of declining enrollment and increasing remediation needs. Administrators admitted that there was simply no way of ensuring that teachers were teaching what was being tested; however, they felt completely confident that curricular validity had been established (their curricular materials and guides included all proficiency standards). All teachers teaching basic math and English classes were encouraged to spend a week or so prior to proficiency testing reviewing the tests. All district categorical programs were focused on basic skills, most of

which could be found in the district proficiency tests. Hence, organization, funding, and content of categorical programs completely overlap the district's proficiency requirements.

Remediation

Remediation was offered in a variety of ways: regular classroom instruction, special classes during the regular school year, summer school classes, and a county drop-in center where students could follow an individualized program. At each school, all math and English teachers were informed about students in their classes who had failed proficiency tests and the areas of needed remediation. Teachers were then asked to focus instruction on these students, thus encouraging a tutorial environment. At all schools, basic math and reading classes were available to students below grade level and for students failing to meet certain levels of proficiency in basic subjects. These classes were concentrating on "basic school skills." Summer classes, which were set up to help students gain the proficiency they needed, were offered and organized by the central office. Out of 1,500 students who had failed some part of the proficiency tests in the prior year, 150 attended the 1979 summer session (100 in math, 50 in English). The county drop-in arrangement offered an individualized way of obtaining help in gaining needed proficiencies. The program was new and the director of curricular services surmised that students had not taken advantage of the service yet. Remediation is judged "complete" when the student retakes and passes the test. The county drop-in center provides retest opportunities monthly; the district offers retest opportunities each spring.

For now, remediation is not a major problem. But all persons interviewed anticipated a very big problem once parents and students faced the sanction of the students' not graduating in 1981. The district's high transiency rate was causing further concern--students simply are not in the district long enough to receive appropriate remediation. Teachers at both schools worry that as more remediation is needed in years to come, there will be a consequent deemphasis on enrichment and elective offerings. Remediation was expected to be useful, but it "isn't" going to provide the "miracle cure." Even with remediation, the director of curricular services expects that 25 percent of the students will ultimately not pass the tests, and that these will be mostly ethnic minorities and LES/NES students.

Results and Effects of Proficiency Assessment

There was uniform concern among those interviewed about the pattern of pupil performance on proficiency tests. The district had set high standards. At the time of the study, 43 percent of the students had passed computation, 71 percent had passed reading comprehension, and 41 percent had passed writing. While these people were proud of the high standards set by the board, administrators and teachers were troubled by the disproportionate failure rates for ethnic minorities and LES/NES students in this district. The director of curricular services estimated that 10 percent of the blacks had passed, and less than 10 percent of the Hispanic group had passed. According to district administrators, a major problem for blacks was the strong local peer pressure not to participate in academic school activities; hence, little motivation to demonstrate "proficiency." The problem for LES/NES students was considered to be a language problem.

Both principals and the director for curricular services indicated that the district had always been committed to providing help for special need students. All felt that there was total overlap between proficiency assessment and categorical programs for special need students.

All mainstreamed special education students were being given the proficiency tests in the usual manner. If a student failed, the school team evaluated performance on the tests with the individual's student record to determine if an individualized test would be more appropriate. If a student failed again, alternative performance indicators were used. Finally, if special education students were judged to have tried "to the best of their ability," a diploma was awarded.

The director of curricular services felt that the proficiency requirements would not hurt special education students. He was far more concerned about the borderline students who did not carry the "special education" label, but who would have great difficulty in passing the district tests. His hope was that this situation would eventually lead to a broadening of the definition of "special education" to include these obviously marginal students.

There was uniform opinion among those interviewed that staff morale was not good. While most staff members supported the state proficiency mandate, staff morale was being severely tested by the superintendent's mandate for a district-wide competency-based system. To many, the hostility resulting from the basic philosophical conflict was swamping the potential positive effects of state-mandated proficiency requirements. One principal also noted that proficiency assessment, falling as it does at the end of a long line of state-mandated programs, was not receiving the attention or commitment it deserved. The staff no longer has the energy to do the proficiency requirements justice. Some teachers commented on the likelihood of additional morale problems as more remediation was necessary and more teachers were assigned to basic skills instruction. Beyond this, teachers felt threatened by the district's plan to use student performance on proficiency tests to evaluate teaching.

And yet, there was some feeling that proficiency assessment had, in fact, resulted in the development of a stronger and better sequenced English curriculum and curriculum guides.

Student morale was perceived as being relatively neutral and "accepting," except among minority students. The administrative consensus was that as 1981 nears, students were taking the tests more seriously. The director of curricular services expressed concern that the drop-out rate would increase as students realized they might not pass the tests. "If, in fact, proficiency testing is chasing kids away, a major purpose of the whole testing process is being defeated." On the other hand, one principal felt that attendance would increase. He felt that proficiency assessment would provide the incentive for students to overcome their skill deficiencies; hence, they would stay in school.

Parent involvement in this district was low. District and school staff interviewed guessed that parents accepted proficiency requirements (even parents of failing students). But all projected a cautious "wait and see" posture and felt a sense of uncertainty about parent reaction once June, 1981, arrived.

The "level of immediacy" was evident to administrators by the poor attendance at school conferences with parents in the prior spring. Parents had not realized the urgency of the situation. Despite numerous attempts to inform and generate community involvement, there continued to be little response.

There was agreement that communication with the community needed more thought. Despite numerous attempts to inform and generate community involvement, there had been little response. Where the law was concerned, all felt the district and schools had done their part; but given the high transiency and high percentage of low income families, the district felt the need to find new ways to reach the community.

Potentials and Problems

The concept of "ownership" was important in the acceptance of proficiency assessment in this district. The local option feature of the law was considered essential to ensure relatively smooth implementation. Through district committees on proficiency assessment, there were opportunities to develop or borrow tests which reflected the standards of this community. From this came the writing packet of which the district was exceedingly proud. The key, said the director of curricular services and the English department heads at both schools, was the fact that the packet focused on instruction rather than the tests. It was felt by the staff that far more emphasis should be placed on classroom instruction--that the energies directed to the proficiency tests themselves were detracting from this more important and difficult area. As painful as the local test development process had sometimes been, the director of curricular services felt that to have been handed intact state tests would have been "disastrous."

It was out of this feeling about the importance of "local" ownership that the director requested a different form of technical assistance than that provided by the state to date. Rather than papers and workshops which came too late to be useful to the district, he would have liked to receive information about what was happening in other districts. He would have liked brief descriptions of effective and ineffective practices, with names and phone numbers of district contact people, so districts could share information with one another directly. Such a book could be updated on a regular basis as new ideas and practices were reported.

Costs loomed central on the list of problems faced by the district. District staff could not understand why funding was provided for notification, yet denied for initial test development, continuing item development, retesting, scoring, and reporting results. According to the director of curricular services, these were huge expenses and were "killing the district."

This district had been conscientious in implementing the proficiency requirements. It had taken the task seriously and given considerable thought and time to the entire process. The staff had worked hard to develop a relatively good proficiency assessment system. But problems remained, and opportunity costs were becoming increasingly evident and serious as the time for withholding diplomas approached.

Case Study Two--High School District in Rural Area

This high school district is rural, small (population 6,200) and ethnically homogeneous. Native Americans (4 percent) and Hispanics (7 percent) make up the only minority populations. Because of the size and character of the community, the district superintendent functions as both a civic and educational leader. He has been in the district six years and is involved in curricular and instructional activities, as well as the administration of both the elementary and high school districts.

Governance

Implementation activities for proficiency assessment began in early 1977, when the superintendent traveled across the state to research the various approaches being taken by local districts toward proficiency assessment. The district management team developed standards with the aid of the faculty. Efforts were made to involve parents who typically did not actively support school activities because of their feelings that school staff were "better equipped" to make educational decisions.

Teachers were very much involved in implementation, according to the administration, and this involvement in test development sustained early staff morale and faculty commitment to the proficiency assessment process. Teachers were also given release time for developing reading and math test items. The focus of district proficiency tests was on consumer skills, such as those required to answer questions found on voter ballots, tax forms, and job applications. Faculty from the high schools wrote the tests, and then the district contracted with a college group for psychometric review and revision of the measures. The college group turned in a disappointing performance, and the district was put in the position of administering its proficiency tests the first time with only minimal prior field testing and item examination. This lack of documented test validity or reliability was reported to parents, and instead of assigning passing scores, student performance was described in three broad categories:

1. Students who performed so well that they were regarded as having passed (upper three stanines)

2. Students who performed in the lowest group, and are currently being offered supplementary instruction (lowest three stanines)

3. Students who performed at a level somewhere between the first two categories and who were retested on the revised district test

Remediation

Since valid test results were not available, the district had not begun formal conferences for proficiency assessment purposes at the time of the site visits. Students at one school who performed in the lowest third were advised in a group conference situation that supplementary instruction was available to them in the fall of 1979. After the January, 1980, administration of the test, individual conferences were to be held for all failing students. All students were sent one of five letters on proficiency assessment status during November, 1979, outlining the general test results and district plans for a public meeting to discuss future administration of the test, conference options, and remediation alternatives.

Three instructional alternatives were available to students at the local high school:

1. Remain with the regular course instructor, and focus instructional time on practicing the basic skills tested on the proficiency test.

2. Agree to a contractual learning lab assignment, which was available to all students, as an alternative to the required courses of study.

3. Agree to a pull-out remediation program assignment, which is credit-bearing and operates like a regular course.

The district hired a new remedial English and math teacher with Title I funds. This person was responsible for teaching the third remediation alternative. In this course, most of the instruction was individualized.

The continuation high school had a pupil-teacher ratio of about 10:1 and instruction was individualized. A majority of the 75 students in the school were in need of remedial help in at least one of the basic skill areas, so remediation for proficiency assessment was built into all of the instructional programs. Since the first administration of the district proficiency test, 25 students had dropped out of the regular high school and enrolled in the continuation high school. The principal felt that proficiency assessment was directly responsible for the students' decision to transfer.

Curriculum and Instruction

All teachers were sent copies of the adopted proficiency standards and asked to identify where the proficiency skills were being taught in their courses. In some cases this meant major curricular revision in order that students be given experiences with applications of the basic skills in "real-life" contexts. There was a general feeling among faculty and administrators that "whether by design, or incidentally, classroom instruction will be based much more narrowly on test performance in the future."

Because the proficiencies were derived from the curriculum, and teachers were involved, the principals felt that the proficiencies either had been covered in the curriculum prior to implementation of proficiency assessment or had been added/incorporated in the curriculum through new course materials. One principal felt that it was too soon to be sure about the effects of proficiency assessment on curriculum and instruction. He said, "Proficiency testing will change the focus in courses toward basic skills, but there is really no way that we can know exactly how unless we observe instruction. And I'm not sure we want to do that." The district was in the process of revising the curriculum guides in early 1977, and it made the decision to postpone the revision process until the district could adopt proficiency standards and decide how the standards would be assessed. The revision of the curriculum guides was in process.

District English and math courses had added specific emphasis on making an applied use of reading and mathematics, filling out job applications, demonstrating comprehension of voter instructions, and performing other applied skill activities.

Results and Effects of Proficiency Assessment

The main effects of proficiency assessment in this district were on how teachers and administrators spent their work time and on curricular and instructional emphasis within courses. Principals and teachers reported that considerable time had been spent in meetings during the past year and a half on developing standards, writing performance indicators, analyzing passing scores and scoring techniques, and administering tests. While the district had always had a heavy emphasis on the "three-Rs," the legal implications of proficiency assessment had compelled the district to approach test development in a more systematic fashion and to organize test administration, scoring, and reporting on a districtwide basis.

Twenty-three percent of the high school population "failed" the 1978-79 proficiency tests (approximately 270 students). Teachers, parents, and students had been notified of the proficiency requirements early in 1977 through general announcements about the law and graduation requirements. Notice was given at formal meetings, informal superintendent's coffee klatches, by newsletter, and by mail. Students were informed of proficiency requirements and the details of testing in a school assembly.

There was a high level of awareness about proficiency requirements among students in the high schools. Only two of the 42 juniors surveyed were unaware of the law. There was some confusion about what the consequences of student failure would be, but students recognized that the tests were required for graduation, had been administered last year, and were about the "right level of difficulty." They were generally supportive of the legislative intent behind proficiency assessment but somewhat resented that "our class should be the ones to get stuck with the extra requirements."

All special education students took the 1979 proficiency tests. Many of these students scored in the lowest three stanines, and the superintendent anticipated submitting a differential standards policy to the board sometime in early 1980. However, there was confusion and disagreement about appropriate policies for special education students, many people feeling that differential standards would be hard to justify.

The district found a high degree of overlap in students who performed poorly on proficiency tests and those who scored in the lowest two quartiles on the test to qualify for Title I status. The same group of students needing proficiency remediation also qualified for the Title I program.

Proficiency assessment had not had a significant effect on morale. The superintendent and one principal felt that it was too early to tell. The other principal indicated that proficiency assessment had had a negative effect on morale. Several of the teachers interviewed seemed demoralized about the holding power of the proficiency requirements. Teachers were concerned that proficiency assessment seemed to be driving classroom instruction and would go away when a new idea came along. Most people felt that it was too early to know about the effects of proficiency assessment on student achievement and that there would be little or no effect on the drop-out rate. One principal felt different:

> Sure, proficiency assessment will affect drop-out rates. We are going to find a lot harder line. What makes us think that kids can live with failure forever? We will see a lot of kids

> dropping out . . . When they could get a diploma for putting in a certain amount of time, it was one thing, but when they know they can't pass this test, they will just drop out.

Teacher responses were mixed about the overall impact of proficiency assessment. While some felt that proficiency assessment would serve as a motivating force for students, to get students to take school seriously, others were skeptical about the holding power of the law and the prospects of "teaching to the test." One said:

> I hope it lasts. It's needed. When you see people using the school district, I think we need some clout. When you put in extra hours, it needs to be worthwhile. Our department generally feels that this is something we should be working on and are ready to put time in.

While another observed:

> I think we are always skeptical of these things when they come out. I don't believe that every student can perform at a prescribed level. This law seems to stick them through a machine and expect them all to achieve the same . . . I think we are dreaming if we expect all kids to achieve equally.

Potential Benefits and Problems

In appraising the district approach to implementing proficiency requirements, the superintendent said that the most effective practices which the district had engaged in were: involving teachers in test development, which acted to have them internalize the process, and sending the principal and vice-principal to the state test development workshops, which were perceived as very useful in improving district confidence in their measures. The district was not very happy with its experience with the college group who had been contracted to assess the psychometric properties of the district test, and this district cautioned other districts to be careful in contracting with external agencies for local test development activities.

The problems associated with implementing proficiency assessment in this district were typical of the problems of many small districts around the state.

Articulating standards with elementary grades was a particular problem for districts maintaining high schools. The high school attendance area included more than the district's elementary feeder schools. Consequently, proficiency test requirements from the six elementary districts were not articulated with the high school standards. The district had gotten a limited amount of assistance from the county office, which helped several of the elementary feeder districts in adoption of similar measures.

Both financial and personnel resources presented particular problems for the small rural district. The district did not have the resources to support a testing office, and the staff frequently juggled multiple assignments and roles. Testing expertise was limited. As mentioned, the district had an unfortunate experience with the group contracted to revise its tests. The test revision

process thus fell upon the management team. While teachers were involved in the initial test development process, it seemed too time-consuming and costly to bring them into the revision process. The result, however, was teacher discontent with the new revision. "This doesn't look like what we wrote." In an effort to involve the teachers in the revision process and regain their support, the district was planning to bring in one of the state trainers who had worked with teachers before for a workshop on linking test results to curriculum and instruction.

District teachers and administrators felt the following types of technical assistance would be useful:

- o A resource expert who could review district tests for psychometric qualities
- o Assistance on how to use test results in curriculum and instruction
- o Help in developing basic skills labs where activities would be cued to district proficiencies

The district was experiencing problems in transmitting test information in a timely fashion to classroom teachers and students. Teachers were concerned about how to organize instruction for those students who needed remediation without sacrificing quality instruction for proficient students.

Legislative requirements for school districts have a problematic effect on small districts. With limited personnel, districts like this one are compelled to give additional assignments beyond classroom instruction. The tasks associated with implementing proficiency assessment require time and expertise which many small districts simply do not have. The district felt the need for resolution of gray areas in the law--providing certificates of attendance, reciprocity of proficiency attainments among districts, legal requirements for remediation, and provisions for students in special education.

This district was actively implementing proficiency assessment and trying hard to link proficiency assessment testing activities to curriculum and instruction. Generally, school staff were in support of the proficiency requirements, and interviews with teachers reflected underlying faculty support for holding students accountable for mastery of the basic skills. However, teachers felt that they had always focused on the basics. Proficiency assessment really "isn't new"; the only new part is the sanction of the diploma. Finally, people were generally in support of the local focus of proficiency implementation. The superintendent articulated this position in saying, "The validity of what we are doing is based on having local tests which are reflective of local curriculum."

Proficiency assessment is making an impact. If the management problems can be worked out so that teachers receive test information on a timely basis and are provided with adequate resources for supplementary instruction (in-service training and materials), the district will meet the intent of the law and satisfy both legislators and local employers that students are being prepared "to deal effectively with adult life."

Chapter 5
Technical Assistance Activities

The Pupil Proficiency Law limits the role of the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education to providing technical assistance to local school districts. The Department is constrained from either developing a statewide test or conducting monitoring and compliance reviews of district implementation activities. The Department has a continuing program of technical assistance that is intended to be responsive to both the immediate and long-range needs of school districts. The following discussion reviews technical assistance provided to date and reports on Implementation Substudy findings on district technical assistance needs.

The Department's Office of Program Evaluation and Research (OPER) has engaged in numerous activities to assist districts. In October, 1977, the Department released the Technical Assistance Guide for Proficiency Assessment (TAG), which is a process guide to implement the law.

In response to the statutory requirement to provide "a range of assessment items" from which school districts might select, OPER released in March, 1978, an item bank appropriate for grades seven-twelve entitled The Sample Assessment Exercises Manual (SAEM). A second SAEM was released in February, 1979, for elementary grades. Both manuals include approximately 1,000 sample test items and statewide field-test performance statistics.

Several appendices to the TAG have been developed. These include: an advisory paper on legal issues, setting differential standards, detecting bias in proficiency tests, and an analysis of the Florida test case, Debra P. v. Turlington.

In addition to these advisory papers, the Department convened a task force to recommend approaches that might be effective in assisting districts solve the problems of helping migrant students meet proficiency requirements.

The Department has attempted to augment the guides, manuals, and advisory papers by training district administrators and teachers in proficiency assessment measurement techniques.

To further support this training and technical assistance network, the Department has established a clearinghouse of effective proficiency assessment practices. The primary vehicle for disseminating information about effective practices is a quarterly newsletter, Proficiency Today.

Various developmental activities are under consideration which may address some of the long-range issues raised by the law. These include: instructional "packets" linking test results to curriculum and instruction, training in student motivational techniques, and research in effective remediation practices.

In the Implementation Substudy, district administrators were asked to assess the usefulness of OPER's major technical assistance efforts, and their responses are reported in Table 29.

TABLE 29

DISTRICT EVALUATION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Type of assistance	Percent of all responding districts			
	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful	Unknown
Technical Assistance Guide (TAG)	48%	33%	6%	13%
Sample Assessment Exercises Manual (SAEM)	48	32	7	13
SAEM Workshops	23	33	8	37
Proficiency Assessment Network Workshops	13	12	4	70

The districts' evaluations of the Technical Assistance Guide (TAG) and Sample Assessment Exercises Manual (SAEM) were very favorable. Both were judged helpful to about 50 percent of the responding districts and somewhat helpful to another one-third of the districts.

Respondents were also given 16 options to identify their technical assistance needs. The most frequent topics cited as "very useful," in order of frequency, were:

- Developing alternative modes of assessment
- Motivating students who fail
- Supplementary instruction
- Remedial strategies
- Proficiency assessment of limited and non-English speakers
- Using proficiency assessment results for diagnosis

Those indicated as "somewhat useful" included, in order of frequency:

- Detecting and eliminating test bias
- Elementary-secondary articulation
- Test construction and revision
- Teaching test-taking strategies
- Scoring writing samples
- Reporting test results

Those cited most frequently as "not useful," presumably because these tasks had been completed, included field testing and setting passing scores.

Chapter 6
Discussion and Analysis

The major issues and problems raised by the study findings will be presented in this chapter, and some analysis of the implications of the findings will be provided. The discussion will be organized around three broad categories: assessment issues, instructional issues, and effects on students.

Assessment Issues

The Pupil Proficiency Law provides broad flexibility for local districts to develop or acquire their own tests. In light of this, the questions most frequently raised about district tests included:

- How great is the variation in skills tested by districts, and are districts primarily testing "school skills" or "life skills"?
- Is there wide variation in the difficulty of district tests?
- Is the psychometric quality of district tests consistent?

Each of these questions will be discussed in turn.

How great is the variation in skills tested by districts, and are districts testing primarily "school skills" or "life skills"? Many questions and concerns have been raised about district definitions of "basic skills." Some people have speculated that districts with large numbers of high-achieving students might assess an inordinately high level of skills; conversely, some have feared that districts with primarily low-achieving students would assess unusually low-level skills.

The Department's analysis of district tests does not support these concerns. The district tests which were reviewed reflected a relatively consistent view of basic skills across the required content areas of reading comprehension, writing, and computation. Very few districts had chosen to assess skills that were unusually simple or extremely complex. In cases where districts had chosen to assess unusually low or high level skills, these skills comprised only a very small portion of the total test.

The most interesting variation was in the choice of whether to assess "school skills," "life skills," or some combination of the two. According to the Department's questionnaire responses, 47 percent of those districts maintaining high schools reported assessing a combination of equal numbers of both types of skills. Thirty-nine percent reported emphasizing primarily "school skills," while 15 percent reported emphasizing primarily "life skills."

These findings have at least two important implications. Approximately one-third of districts testing primarily "life skills" reported that most of those skills were only recently added to their curriculum and instructional program. There is a significant question as to whether students in some districts have had an adequate opportunity to be taught the required skills.

Second, given the variation from district to district on testing of "school skills" or "life skills," a student transferring from a district that emphasized "life skills" to a district that emphasized "school skills" may not have an adequate opportunity to learn the skills measured by the new district's test.

Is there wide variation in the difficulty of district tests? This question is technically unanswerable. Each district is required to either design or acquire measures of student proficiency. Therefore, there is no common basis on which to compare either test difficulty or student performance from district to district. Only in cases where districts had adopted the same commerically developed test or where the districts were drawing from a common item pool would it be possible to meaningfully compare passing levels. Less than 25 percent of the districts in the Department's statewide sample used commercial tests. The vast majority of districts used different tests and item pools. Therefore, it is not feasible to compare difficulty levels of tests.

The Department informally examined test complexity using an expert review and content analysis. A group of curriculum content specialists reviewed the tests and test items to assess relative complexity. After they reviewed a sample of computation and writing tests, the content specialists concluded that none of the tests was unusually complex or difficult, or beyond the levels envisioned by the law as they understood it. The reading specialists felt it was inappropriate to make judgments about relative difficulty levels among tests.

What is clear from the Department's analysis is that most districts were assessing the same types of basic skills. While the data revealed a few tests that were unusually easy or complex, on the whole the complexity of skills assessed on district proficiency tests did not vary to any great extent.

Is the psychometric quality of district tests consistent, and how does it measure up to published psychometric standards? Many factors affect the psychometric quality of district proficiency tests. Unless the district developing its own test has persons on its staff with adequate training in measurement skills or can hire such persons, it is conceivable that mistakes could be made in the test development process that would affect psychometric quality. By contrast, districts buying a commercially developed test or selecting from a carefully constructed item pool can be reasonably assured of having a test that has been constructed consistent with psychometric standards. There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach.

The 1980 data revealed that if teachers in a district were involved in test development, selecting test objectives, writing or reviewing test specifications, or preparing test questions, the teachers felt a sense of commitment to, and ownership of, the test. The data suggested that district-developed tests were more likely to reflect local basic skills objectives and curricula and instructional methods than were commercially developed tests. Case-Study interviews indicated that teachers often feel uncomfortable when working with a commercial test which they had no part in developing. They may, therefore, feel less "ownership" of the skills tested and less responsibility for teaching those skills.

There are definite trade-offs between locally developed and commercially developed tests. Commercially developed tests are likely to provide a sophisticated assessment package, with psychometric elegance. Locally developed tests

are likely to engender a greater sense of teacher ownership and more accurately reflect community needs and preferences. This, the Department believes, is a choice the law anticipated and one that districts are best able to make.

The three substudies indicate that district tests would benefit from careful review and refinement. Some of the weaknesses which were evident included: inadequate directions for test takers, poor layout, lack of item specifications, and failure to review for cultural bias.

To be of maximum value, district-developed tests need to meet standards of practical utility as well as professional psychometric standards. Given training, expert assistance, and time, the Department feels that the psychometric limitations in district-developed tests can be corrected. Development and refinement of a test by district staff are continuous processes, which can result in a test which meets professional standards and also has practical value to teachers.

Instructional Issues

The pupil proficiency requirements are more than simply a "testing mandate." Development and administration of the proficiency test are only part of the broader requirements to provide basic instruction for all students in the skills measured by the test, notification and conferences for parents of students who fail periodic assessments, and remedial instruction for students who fail.

Major questions raised about the instructional aspects of the law included:

- Are the skills assessed by proficiency tests adequately reflected in districts' curriculum and classroom instruction?
- Are requirements for basic skills assessment and instruction "taking over" the curriculum and leading to a deemphasis in areas such as social studies, science, art, and foreign languages?
- Are parents of failing students responding to requests to appear for school conferences?
- What kinds of problems are districts and schools having in conducting parent conferences?
- How effectively have districts and schools been able to organize remedial programs for students who fail proficiency tests?

Each of these questions will be discussed in turn.

Are the skills assessed by proficiency tests adequately reflected in districts' curriculum and classroom instruction? District administrators reported that proficiency requirements had had a demonstrable impact on curriculum and instruction, especially at the secondary level. Forty-two percent of the districts maintaining high schools reported that proficiency assessment had had a "significant" effect on curriculum and instruction; 56 percent reported at least a "marginal" impact on curriculum and instruction. In addition, more than

90 percent of high school and unified districts reported that more time was being devoted to basic skills instruction than in the past; more than 65 percent reported revision of existing curriculum materials, development of new materials, and addition of new courses; and more than 60 percent reported reassignment of teaching staff and modification of teaching methods. Further, virtually all districts (96 percent) reported providing teachers with copies of proficiency statements while somewhat fewer (84 percent) reported giving teachers copies of detailed test descriptions.

These data, as well as Case-Study findings, suggest that important efforts are being made to relate proficiency objectives to curriculum and classroom instruction. It should be noted that the present study made no effort to track the presence of proficiency-related objectives or instruction through district curriculum guides or systematic classroom observations. Even within a single district, this would be an enormous and costly task, which was beyond the scope of this study.

Case-Study data suggest that in-service training of teachers was not widely used to orient teachers to proficiency requirements nor to train them in approaches to teaching basic skills. While 80 percent of the districts responding to the questionnaire reported teacher involvement in test development and scoring, the Department has no indication of the number of teachers actually involved. However, the Department feels that in-service training could be more widely used to assist teaching staffs in such tasks as using test results and providing remedial instruction.

Are requirements for basic skills assessment and instruction "taking over" the curriculum and leading to a deemphasis in areas such as social studies, science, art, and foreign languages? This question is very difficult to answer given the scope of the study. Staff did not interview social studies, science, art, or foreign language teachers, nor systematically examine changes in required and elective courses offered by schools in the Case-Study sample.

However, the Department did find that many more students than expected (30 to 50 percent) seemed to be failing at least one portion of the proficiency tests in grade ten. The Department suspects this has led to placement of many students in remedial classes and, presumably, lessened their opportunities to take higher-level courses. Undoubtedly, these students are losing the opportunity to be exposed to material in their regular enriched English and mathematics classes, or losing the opportunity to take advanced courses in these subjects. Whether they are limited in taking courses in other subject areas was difficult to tell at the time the study was conducted.

In addition, information from the case studies suggests that the responsibility for teaching basic skills in Case-Study high schools is falling primarily on English and math instructors. When chairpersons of these departments were interviewed, they consistently reported that teachers in their departments were spending more time in basic skills and remedial instruction than they had in the past. In Case-Study districts, the availability of advanced courses in English and mathematics was being limited in response to the emphasis on basic skills instruction.

There is a curious paradox inherent in the question of whether basic skills are overwhelming the curriculum. Many students cannot demonstrate proficiency

in basic skills. It is not clear how much they could benefit from more advanced courses, whether in English, mathematics, or other subject areas. But, if students are not challenged to aspire to learn higher-level content and skills, there is a real danger that high school curricula could become trivialized. Certainly, this issue merits further study. Any additional examination ought, minimally, to examine such factors as direct student instructional time in basic skills versus advanced or enrichment courses; changes in numbers of basic skills versus advanced or enrichment courses over time; perceptions of teachers of social studies, science, art, and foreign languages; perceptions of students; and perceptions of parents.

Are parents of failing students responding to requests to appear for conferences? The requirement that schools hold conferences with the parents of students not making sufficient progress was intended to alert parents to their child's basic skills, strengths, and weaknesses; describe the remedial program the school would provide; and discuss ways in which the parent could help the child in basic skills at home. The law requires schools to notify parents in writing of their child's progress and the available date(s) for a conference. Should parents fail to respond to the initial notification, the school is required to follow up with another letter or with a telephone call.

Data from the Implementation Substudy suggest that many parents of high school students are failing to appear for conferences. About 25 percent of the sample districts reported that less than half of the parents of failing students attended conferences at their schools. Eleven percent of the responding districts reported that less than 25 percent of the parents appeared for conferences.

Case-Study data suggest that districts were using a variety of methods to notify parents and schedule conferences. Several districts scheduled conferences in the evenings in an attempt to accommodate working parents. However, few if any of the approaches to notification or scheduling seemed to lead consistently to high rates of parent attendance.

This low parent response may be due to several factors. First, the parents of high school students have not traditionally been as involved with the schools as have parents of elementary school students. To an extent, parents of high school students have not typically been asked to come to school in the past, and may be having difficulty adjusting to the new requirements. Second, despite extensive efforts by districts and schools to notify them, many parents may not yet be aware of the seriousness of the ultimate sanction--denial of a high school diploma--attached to proficiency test failure. Many parents may view the proficiency failure notification as just another report of test scores or as a report card the school is sending home for their information.

With little more than one year left before diplomas are withheld because a student fails to meet the district standards, this problem of parent nonattendance at conferences seems extremely serious. The Department of Education is planning to develop an advisory paper for school districts which draws from the experiences of the Case-Study districts and suggests effective strategies in getting parents to attend conferences. Beyond this, it seems incumbent on districts and schools to make every possible effort to be sure that parents are aware of proficiency requirements and, if necessary, become involved in helping the school help their children master the required basic skills.

What kinds of problems are districts and schools having in conducting parent conferences? Apart from limited parent response, districts and schools report two major problems with holding conferences: the logistical problems involved in recordkeeping and scheduling conferences at times when appropriate staff and parents can attend; and lack of funding to support staff (largely teachers and in some cases, counselors) to conduct conferences.

The former concern (logistics) should ease as high schools gain more experience with organizing and scheduling conferences. Funding to support staff costs for conferences may become available since the State Board of Control has voted to allow state reimbursement for conference expenses. What will be particularly important, however, is exactly what level of reimbursement the Board of Control and the Legislature ultimately decide to provide. The level of reimbursement should be adequate to permit high schools to conduct individual, rather than group, conferences for parents, and it must also allow for the costs of holding conferences in the evenings if this is necessary to ensure parent attendance. There should also be some mechanism to ensure that funds provided for conferences are actually "passed through" by districts to schools.

How effectively have districts and schools been able to organize remedial programs for students who fail proficiency tests? The Implementation Substudy asked who was responsible for remedial programs and what types of approaches were being used. For the most part, school districts were not organizing highly centralized remedial programs, but instead were leaving responsibility for remedial efforts to individual schools. In cases where schools have adequate resources to carry out the task and have teachers adequately trained to provide remediation, this may work well. But in instances where neither resources nor staff are adequate, the school may be left to piece together a program as best it can. For example, in one of the Case-Study high schools, a teacher who had in the past taught five periods of music was now assigned to teach one period of music and four periods of remedial math. It was also not clear how, with responsibility for remedial teaching so widely dispersed among schools, sharing of effective approaches could be easily accomplished within a district. While many districts reported making standardized teaching materials keyed to proficiency tests available to schools, staff saw little evidence in Case-Study districts of efforts to design and share specific teaching techniques and strategies or to provide in-service training.

The settings used to provide remedial instruction seemed familiar. Virtually all districts were using in-class remediation, while about two-thirds reported using tutorial programs. About half the districts were using pull-out programs (special classes) and were planning to use summer school. In the case studies, Department staff observed that relatively few new settings for, or approaches to, remedial instruction had been developed at the secondary level. Many students in these programs still are hard to motivate, and it is sometimes difficult to find teachers trained or willing to teach those basic skills courses. In light of this, some serious research on effective techniques of providing remedial programs for high school students seems warranted.

Case-Study interviews surfaced two other issues. First, student absenteeism emerged as a major problem, especially in the larger urban high schools. As one teacher in a large, urban high school in southern California commented:

> We've got good teachers and a good program here. Everyone is committed to teaching basic skills. But on any given day,

> nearly one-fourth of our students don't show up, and it's hard to try to teach basic skills to students who aren't here.

While this study did not systematically examine the relationship of student absenteeism to performance on proficiency tests, it is likely that many chronically absent students are also performing poorly on these tests. Thus, added to the responsibilities of many districts and schools to provide programs which will motivate students to learn basic skills and to persuade parents of failing students to attend conferences, there seems to be a prior task--motivating students to attend school in the first place.

Another issue raised in the case studies was that of confusion in high schools about the appropriateness of using categorical funding sources (for example, compensatory education and bilingual education funds) to help support remedial programs for failing students. Some high school principals addressed the issue cautiously, because they had apparently been given instructions that use of categorical funding for proficiency remediation constituted "supplanting" of local and state funds. Other principals were less patient with the complex requirements and argued that in many cases the categorical funds were the only means they had to provide meaningful remedial programs. Schoolwide programs, such as school improvement, seemed to produce far less confusion, because these programs are explicitly designed to serve all students in a school rather than only an identified subgroup. In several Case-Study districts, school improvement was being used in a number of creative ways to improve organization of, and instruction in, basic skills programs. This study leads the Department to believe that schools may be suffering from a lack of clear direction as to the use of categorical funds for remedial programs for students who fail proficiency tests. State and district efforts to clarify these policies would seem helpful at this time.

Effects on Students

Ultimately, the weight of the pupil proficiency requirement falls on students. Under current law, all California seniors in the class of 1981, and in each class thereafter, will be required to meet course requirements and pass district proficiency tests in order to receive a high school diploma. Questions raised regarding the effects of proficiency testing requirements on students include:

- Are students aware of proficiency testing requirements, and how are they responding?
- How many students are failing proficiency tests?
- Are proficiency testing requirements disproportionately affecting minority students?
- How is proficiency testing likely to affect drop-out rates?
- Are school districts adopting "differential standards" for students in special education programs?

Each of these questions will be addressed in turn.

Are students aware of proficiency requirements, and how are they responding? In each of the Case-Study schools, a small unrepresentative sample of eleventh grade students were surveyed in order to learn what they knew about proficiency requirements and their general reactions to the tests. Student awareness was encouraging. Almost all (96 percent) of the students surveyed knew that they had to pass proficiency tests in order to graduate from high school. Almost 90 percent of the students responding had taken one or more proficiency tests, and three-quarters of these students felt that the tests were "about the right degree of difficulty." The remaining 25 percent was evenly divided as to whether the test was "too hard" or "too easy." Students who failed one or more of the tests were asked for their reactions to remedial programs. Eighty-five percent of the students found the remedial programs "very useful" or "somewhat useful," and only 15 percent found them "not useful." Thus, the students in the Department's limited Case-Study sample seemed to be aware of the proficiency tests, found them generally reasonable in terms of difficulty level, and seemed to be responding positively to remedial programs when these were provided.

How many students are failing proficiency tests? In the Measures Survey questionnaire, districts were asked to report the percent of students in the high school graduating class of 1981 who had passed proficiency tests during the 1978-79 school year (as high school sophomores). About one-half of the districts responding reported that 70 percent or more of their students had passed. Conversely, about half the districts reported that less than 70 percent of their students had passed. Of this latter group of districts, more than 30 percent reported that less than 60 percent of their tenth graders had passed. While districts were not asked to project failure rates for these students when they became high school seniors in 1981, the proportions of students failing as high school sophomores seemed high. Two caveats are important in considering these findings. First, despite follow-up requests, the response rate from districts on this question was relatively low (62 percent). Second, in some cases the passing rates reported may have been from "field tests" of district proficiency tests, rather than from administrations of the final tests the districts had decided on.

Nevertheless, if 1978-79 failure rates are even close to the level the data suggest, several issues should be raised. First, it is possible that the ultimate proportion of students who would be denied diplomas in 1981 could be even higher than the 7.8 percent projected by district administrators and reported in the 1979 study. Second, with such high potential failure rates combined with some uncertainty about the ability of high schools to develop effective remedial programs quickly, there is some question as to whether the schools can, by 1981, adequately respond to needs of the large number of failing students. And finally, as noted in the 1979 study report, it is not clear whether local school district boards and communities will be willing to tolerate large numbers of students being denied diplomas in 1981. This could lead to pressure to reduce the difficulty levels of tests or lower passing scores.

Reducing test difficulty or lowering passing scores may not, in some cases, be as heinous as it sounds. One of the central assumptions behind the Pupil Proficiency Law was that students having difficulty learning basic skills would be identified as early as possible and receive remedial programs that would help them learn the required skills in time to pass the proficiency tests before graduation. This assumption depended in large part on districts' ability to provide

efficient, sharply focused remedial programs that were effective in reducing failure rates. While it is certainly too early to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of these programs, it may be that in some districts remedial programs are simply not working as effectively as the board or district administrators would like. In such cases, boards may feel it is unfair to penalize students for program weaknesses, and they may feel inclined to reduce test difficulty or to lower passing scores.

Are proficiency requirements disproportionately affecting minority students? Efforts to gather data on proficiency test failure rates for minority students were not very fruitful for a variety of reasons. First, districts are not required to maintain records of test performance by racial or ethnic background of students. Therefore, many districts do not even keep such records. Second, some districts which do maintain these records were unwilling to release them for fear that revealing the records might lead to or support legal challenges to their programs.

From the very limited racial/ethnic data that were gathered from the case studies, it is clear that in the districts that provided data, black and Hispanic students are failing proficiency tests at rates greater than those of white, Anglo students. For example, in one district, whites were passing the reading comprehension test at a rate of 86 percent, while blacks and Hispanics were passing at rates of 61 percent and 64 percent, respectively. In another district, all students were passing the entire proficiency test at a rate of 32 percent, while blacks were passing at a rate of 5 percent and Hispanics were passing at a rate of 15 percent. It is impossible to tell from the limited study data whether this pattern holds statewide.

How are proficiency requirements likely to affect drop-out rates? It is virtually impossible to gather reliable information from districts on drop-out rates and to aggregate this information across districts. First, districts are not required to maintain information on dropouts. Second, simply knowing that a student has dropped out does not explain his or her motivation for leaving school. In order to find this out, the student would have to be traced and interviewed, a very costly procedure beyond the scope of the present study.

However, both substudy and Case-Study questions solicited perceptions of administrators and teachers about dropouts. District administrators were asked in the Implementation Survey to comment on whether they felt the drop-out rate would increase, decrease, or remain the same. Thirty-seven percent reported they felt the drop-out rate would increase, 55 percent reported that there would be no change, and 8 percent felt it would decrease.

Some of the school staff interviewed pointed out that course requirements may have far more influence on a student's decision to drop out than proficiency tests would. This may be true, because as students progress through high school, they must pass enough courses to meet the district's "unit requirements" for graduation. Generally, a student cannot fail many courses and still accumulate enough "units" to graduate with his or her peers. If a student fails a large number of courses during the early years of high school, it is not likely that he or she will be able to make up credits during the senior year. Thus, whether or not the student has passed the proficiency tests, or feels that he or she could pass them during the senior year, the hopeless shortage of "units" may make the student feel it is not worth returning for the senior year.

To attribute expected increases in drop-out rates to proficiency testing may be somewhat simplistic without considering the interaction of course and testing requirements for graduation. It is possible that since proficiency tests offer a relatively quick, focused means of meeting a portion of the graduation requirements, these tests may be attractive to students who have seriously decided to commit themselves to studying for, and subsequently passing, the proficiency tests.

Are school districts adopting "differential standards" for students in special education programs? District boards are given the option to adopt policies providing for "differential standards" for students in special education programs who have diagnosed learning disabilities that would preclude them from attaining the district's regular standards, even with appropriate educational services and support. Should districts elect to adopt differential standards, the standards for each student must be included in that student's individualized education program (IEP).

The 1979 study reported that a relatively small number of districts (about one-third) had adopted differential standards. At the time of the previous study, many districts had not yet considered the issue. Data from the current study are more encouraging. Of the responding high school and unified districts, 58 percent had adopted policies providing for differential standards, 13 percent had elected not to adopt such policies, and 22 percent reported that they had not yet considered the issue.

Of continuing concern is the relatively large number of districts that have not yet considered the differential standards option. By default, these districts have elected not to provide differential standards.

Appendixes

Appendix I is documentation on the sample, and it includes definitions of the stratification variables and sample documentation. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the implementation sample was revised to generate a representative sample of high school and unified districts.

Appendix II contains copies of instruments. Included are the Measures Survey and accompanying letter to district superintendents, which was sent on May 24, 1979, and the Implementation Survey, with accompanying letter to district superintendents, which was sent on October 16, 1979.

Other instruments and documentation of procedures used in the 1980 study are available for examination at the Office of Program Evaluation and Research, California State Department of Education, 721 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, CA 95814.

Appendix I
Sampling Framework

For purposes of analysis, districts in the Measures Substudy were classified according to four dimensions, based upon data from the California Assessment Program files. These dimensions are type, size, AFDC, and geographic location. Each of these dimensions is described in detail below.

District type: Legislative time lines for elementary and high school districts are different. In order to reflect these differing time lines, districts were typed as either elementary, high school, unified elementary, or unified high school.

District size: Districts were classified as high, medium, or low, according to enrollment figures from the California Assessment Program files. The number of students associated with each of the classifications is listed below:

Enrollment:

Large:	10,000 - 573,000
Medium:	1,000 - 9,999
Small:	Less than 1,000 a.d.a.

AFDC: The percent Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was used as an index of district socioeconomic status. Districts were classified according to the following AFDC breakdowns:

Percent AFDC:

High:	12.20%
Medium:	6.30% - 12.19%
Low:	0 - 6.29%

District location: District location was classified as rural, urban, or suburban based on the following index of school location:

Urban: City of more than 300,000 population

Suburban: City of more than 100,000 but less than 300,000:

1. Usually characterized as by itself, not as being near or part of a more populated area

2. Located near a city of more than 300,000

Community (incorporated as a city or town or an unincorporated area) of more than 25,000 but less than 100,000):

1. Usually characterized as by itself, not as being near or part of a more populated area

2. Located near a city of more than 300,000

3. Located near a city of more than 100,000 but less than 300,000

Community (incorporated as a city or town or an unincorporated area) of 2,500 - 25,000:

1. Usually characterized as by itself, not as being near or part of a more populated area
2. Located near a city of more than 300,000
3. Located near a city of more than 100,000 but less than 300,000
4. Located near a city or town of more than 25,000 but less than 100,000

Rural: Rural area with less than 2,500 population:

1. Usually characterized as by itself, not as being near or part of a more populated area
2. Located near a city of more than 300,000
3. Located near a city of more than 100,000 but less than 300,000
4. Located near a city or town of more than 25,000 but less than 100,000
5. Located near a city or town of more than 2,500 but less than 25,000

Revised Sampling Framework

Unified (1):

Low(1)				
Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S(1)	31	8	8	.26
M(2)	66	10	14	.21
H(3)	35	8	8	.23

High (2)				
Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S	22	4	5	.23
M	68	10	14	.21
L	41	13	13	.32

Elementary (2):

Low(1)				
Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S	238	15	15	-
M	76	7	7	-
L	7	4	4	-

High (2)				
Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S	227	14	14	-
M	112	12	12	-
L	8	5	5	-

High school (3):

Low(1)				
Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S	23	11	11	.48
M	36	7	8	.22
L	11	6	6	.55

High (2)				
Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S	17	4	4	.24
M	22	4	5	.23
L	6	2	2	.33

3. Located near a city of more than 100,000 but less than 300,000

Community (incorporated as a city or town or an unincorporated area) of 2,500 - 25,000:

1. Usually characterized as by itself, not as being near or part of a more populated area

2. Located near a city of more than 300,000

3. Located near a city of more than 100,000 but less than 300,000

4. Located near a city or town of more than 25,000 but less than 100,000

Rural: Rural area with less than 2,500 population:

1. Usually characterized as by itself, not as being near or part of a more populated area

2. Located near a city of more than 300,000

3. Located near a city of more than 100,000 but less than 300,000

4. Located near a city or town of more than 25,000 but less than 100,000

5. Located near a city or town of more than 2,500 but less than 25,000

Revised Sampling Framework

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Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
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L	7	4	4	-

High (2)				
Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S	227	14	14	-
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Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
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L	11	6	6	.55

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Size	Total population	Number measures sample	Implementation sample	Percent revised of total population
S	17	4	4	.24
M	22	4	5	.23
L	6	2	2	.33

Appendix II
Instruments Used in Study

WILSON RILES
Superintendent of Public Instruction
and Director of Education

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STATE EDUCATION BUILDING, 721 CAPITOL MALL, SACRAMENTO 95814

May 24, 1979

TO: District Superintendents

FROM: Donald R. McKinley
Chief Deputy Superintendent

SUBJECT: Status of Proficiency Assessment Requirements:
Survey of Measures

In the 1978-79 school year, the proficiency provisions of the Education Code require elementary districts to adopt standards of proficiency in the basic skills and secondary districts to begin assessing pupils against district standards (Education Code Section 51215). Any student who is not making sufficient progress toward attainment of the local standards is to be provided with a parent conference and supplementary instruction in the basic skills (Education Code Section 51216).

As you may recall, in August 1978, the Department conducted a voluntary survey of proficiency implementation. The survey provided the Legislature with background information about the standards being adopted and initial implementation activities. The Legislature was pleased to find in the analysis of this data a concerted, serious level of implementation in most districts. At the March 1979, budget hearings the Legislature requested an update on proficiency assessment implementation. In particular, the Legislature is concerned about the types of measures which districts are using and the nature of supplementary instruction/remediation programs in the basic skills. Although this survey is not on the Data Acquisition Calendar, it has been approved as an emergency survey by the Department's Data Acquisition Review Committee (DARC).

A two-phase study is planned to provide information about the content of district measures, the linkage between local measures and district curriculum/instruction, and projected needs for supplementary instruction. Both legislative and Department staff are interested in using this information in planning future technical assistance in the following areas: development/selection of diagnostic measures, alternative assessment, and approaches to supplementary instruction.

- Phase I of this study is a content analysis of district measures. It is not an analysis of the validity or reliability indices of district tests. Rather, we are interested in the types of content being tested and the anticipated pass/fail rates based upon pilot test data or other district projections.

- Phase II of the study, to be conducted in the fall, will examine the match between local measures and the district curriculum and instruction and the provision of supplementary instruction, which will focus on district needs for students who fail interim assessments.

Your district has been selected as part of a 10 percent random sample for this study. We are asking you to send copies of your proficiency measures and ancillary materials listed at the top of the survey to the Department. Data from districts will be held in confidence and used only for the purpose of this study. Individual district responses will not be identified.

We are sending the survey at this late date, because it is crucial that we initiate Phase I of the study over the summer in order to anticipate needs for supplementary instruction during the coming year.

Recognizing the enormous demands made upon local personnel at this time of year, we have kept the survey instrument as short as possible. It is important that the survey be completed by the person in your district who is most knowledgeable regarding proficiency assessment implementation. We recognize that elementary districts and elementary grades within unified districts may not have developed proficiency tests yet. Where this is true, please send us whatever materials you may have developed at this time. It is important that we receive these materials no later than July 1, 1979.

Your cooperation in this survey is very important for legislative discussion and decision making. If you have any questions, please contact:

Proficiency Survey Coordinator
Office of Program Evaluation and Research
California State Department of Education
721 Capitol Mall, Fourth Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 445-0297

DRM:cw

Please return NO LATER THAN July 1, 1979 to:

Proficiency Survey Coordinator
Office of Program Evaluation and Research
California State Department of Education
721 Capitol Mall, Fourth Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 445-0297

district label w/CDS code

To be completed by the person in each elementary, secondary, or unified district most knowledgeable about implementation of Proficiency Assessment

Please insert name and address of contact person:

_____

_____

STATUS REPORT: PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT MEASURES

Checklist--Please check off the proficiency test materials for reading, writing, and math that you have enclosed:

Proficiency statements
Test(s) (all forms: label grades at which each is administered)
Test descriptions (specifications)
Summary of field test data
Passing score information (cut point, procedures for establishing passing scores)

INFORMATION ABOUT TESTS
(Circle as many as apply.)

1. Who developed the test(s)?

   a. District-developed by teachers
   b. District-developed by central office staff
   c. District-developed with assistance of outside consultant(s)
   d. Custom-developed commercially
      Specify firm _____
   e. Off-the-shelf commercial test
      Specify firm _____

2. Are you using any items from item pools?

   a. Yes, SAEM state-developed items
   b. Yes, public agency item pool
      Source _____
   c. Yes, private firm
      Source _____
   d. No. If not, where did you get your items? _____

3. How were passing scores determined?

   a. Teacher judgment
   b. Community advisory input
   c. Field test data
   d. Other (describe on reverse)

4. How are passing scores used?

   a. Combined cut score for reading, writing, and math
   b. A cut score for each subject area
   c. A cut score for each subtest within each subject area
   d. A passing score range, rather than a single score
   e. Other--specify _____

5. How are tests used?

   a. For proficiency certification
   b. For assessing overall proficiency program
   c. For grade in course
   d. For individual student diagnosis
   e. Other--specify _____

6. Do other districts share this test?

   a. Yes (list cooperating districts on reverse)
   b. No

7. Enter percent of this year's sophomore class (grade 10) who passed the proficiency test.

   __ __%

WILSON RILES
Superintendent of Public Instruction
and Director of Education
1

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STATE EDUCATION BUILDING, 721 CAPITOL MALL, SACRAMENTO 95814

October 16, 1979

TO: Selected District Superintendents

FROM: Donald R. McKinley
Chief Deputy Superintendent

SUBJECT: Survey of Implementation of Proficiency Assessment Requirements

On May 21, 1979, I sent a survey questionnaire which was part of a several phase study of proficiency assessment implementation requested in the 1979 Budget Act. The phases of the study are:

1. A content analysis of district measures, in progress, to describe to the Legislature the form and content of the district tests.

2. A survey of the linkage and remediation process, which is a follow-up on the initial 1978 data collection effort.

3. A series of in-depth interviews in a sample of districts which will examine the match between the content of local proficiency measures and curriculum and instruction in the district.

This request is in response to phase two of the study. In phase two, we are returning to the phase one "Measures" sample of districts for continuity in data collection. Once again, we are requesting your cooperation in helping us study current implementation progress by completing the enclosed questionnaire.

This survey is designed to provide the Legislature and the Department with information about district plans for ensuring a match between test content and local curriculum and instruction. We are also interested in the potential effect of proficiency assessment in the district and plans for providing supplementary instruction for students who are not making adequate progress.

As in our phase one study, data from districts will be held in confidence and used only for the purpose of this study. However, given the long-term implications of the pupil proficiency law, the Legislature wishes to be kept up-to-date on implementation progress and technical assistance needs.

Your cooperation is sincerely appreciated. Please consult other staff wherever necessary in completing the questionnaire. In order to make most timely use of the information, we will need to have your completed survey by November 1, 1979. If you have any questions, please call:

Proficiency Assessment Coordinator
Office of Program Evaluation and Research
721 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 445-0297

DRM:bs (1)

Enclosure

Please return NO LATER THAN November 30, 1979, to:

Proficiency Survey Coordinator
Office of Program Evaluation and Research
California State Department of Education
721 Capitol Mall, Fourth Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 445-0297

To be completed by the person in each district most knowledgeable about the implementation of Pupil Proficiency Assessment

PUPIL PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT SURVEY

This questionnaire is designed to collect proficiency assessment data about the match between test content, local curriculum, and instruction. Please take about 15 to 20 minutes to respond to the questions that follow. Feel free to consult other district staff when necessary. Unified districts: please respond to the survey regarding implementation of proficiency assessment in the secondary grades.

A. IMPACT ON CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. How would you assess the general impact of proficiency assessment on curriculum and instruction in your district? (Circle one number.)

   1. Has significantly affected curriculum and instruction
   2. Has marginally affected curriculum and instruction
   3. Has not affected curriculum and instruction (go to number 3)

2. If curriculum and/or instruction have been revised to reflect proficiency requirements, what changes have been made? (Circle one number in each lettered row.)

	Yes	No
a. Revision of curriculum materials by district staff	1	2
b. Development of new materials by district staff	1	2
c. Revision of curriculum materials by publisher	1	2
d. Reassignment of teaching staff	1	2
e. More time devoted to teaching basic skills or remediation	1	2
f. Modification of teaching methods	1	2
g. Addition of new courses, e.g. _____	1	2
h. Other (explain) _____	1	2

3. What is your district doing to ensure that specific proficiency skills are included in classroom instruction in the ways which they are tested (e.g., teachers have been given copies of test descriptions). Explain briefly. (Use page 11 if more space is needed.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Proficiency tests vary as to whether they asses. "school skills" (e.g., multiplying decimals) or "life skills" (e.g., computing sales tax). Circle the option below which best describes your district's proficiency tests. (Circle one number.)

   1. Primarily "school skills" (Go to number 6.)
   2. Primarily "life skills"
   3. Equal amounts of each

5. To what extent are the life skill proficiencies assessed in your test included in the curriculum/instructional program? (Circle one number.)

   1. We have little or no emphasis on "life skills" in the curriculum/ instructional program.
   2. Most of the "life skills" tested have always been in our curriculum/ instructional program.
   3. Most of the "life skills" tested have been added to the curriculum/ instructional program since our test was adopted.

B. NOTIFICATION AND TEST RESULTS

6. Approximately when were parents first notified about the content of district proficiency tests? (Enter approximate dates.)

   Elementary: _____ (month) _____ (year) Secondary: _____ (month) _____ (year)

7. Approximately when did the district first notify school staff about the content of proficiency tests? (Enter approximate dates.)

Elementary: _____ _____ Secondary: _____ _____
month year month year

8. What information were parents and teachers given about proficiency testing requirements? (Circle appropriate numbers in each lettered row.)

	To parents	To teachers	To neither
a. Copies of proficiency/competency statements	1	2	3
b. Grade levels to be tested and when	1	2	3
c. Skill or competency descriptions (item specifications)	1	2	3
d. Conferencing procedures	1	2	3
e. Remediation requirements	1	2	3
f. Other (explain) _____			

9. How were parents and teachers notified about proficiency testing requirements? (Circle appropriate numbers in each lettered row.)

	Parents	Teachers	Neither
a. Mail	1	2	3
b. Meetings	1	2	3
c. Posted notice	1	2	3
d. School newspaper	1	2	3
e. Public newspaper	1	2	3
f. Individual conferences	1	2	3
g. Other (explain) _____			

10. How were teachers involved in test development? (Circle one number in each lettered row.)

	Yes	No
a. Generating proficiency statements	1	2
b. Writing item specifications (detailed descriptions of the skill being assessed and the manner of assessment)	1	2
c. Writing test items	1	2
d. Field testing	1	2
e. Setting passing scores	1	2
f. Other (explain) _____	1	2

_____

11. What test information is reported to teachers about individual students? (Circle one number in each lettered row.)

	Yes	No	Not applicable
a. Total test score (i.e., one combined test score)	1	2	3
b. Subject area scores (e.g., math, reading, writing)	1	2	3
c. Subtest scores within each subject area (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension)	1	2	3
d. No information about individual students is provided to teachers	1	2	3
e. Other (explain) _____	1	2	3

_____

12. How long after administering proficiency tests are results available to teachers? (Circle one number.)

1. Less than 1 month
2. Between 1 and 3 months
3. More than 3 months
4. It varies (explain) _____

_____

13. How long after administering proficiency tests are results communicated to parents of students who fail the proficiency test? (Circle one number.)

1. Less than 1 month
2. Between 1 and 3 months
3. More than 3 months
4. It varies (explain) _____

_____

14. AB 3408/AB 65 require that parents of students "not making sufficient progress" be invited to a conference. When are conferences held for students needing remediation? (Circle one number.)

1. Less than 1 month
2. Between 1 and 3 months
3. More than 3 months
4. Other (explain) _____

_____

15. FOR SECONDARY ONLY: If you held parent conferences during 1978-79, what percent of the parents of tenth grade students did not appear for their conference?

_____% (Please estimate percent.) _____ Have not held conferences

C. SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTION (REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES)

16. In general, are remedial programs for proficiency assessment the same for all schools in your district? (Circle one number.)

1. Yes
2. No

If no, how are they different? _____

_____

17. Who has primary responsibility for remedial programs for proficiency assessment in your district? (Circle appropriate numbers in each lettered row.)

	Central office staff	School-level staff
a. Organization of classes	1	2
b. Content of classes	1	2
c. Selection of students	1	2
d. Assignment of personnel	1	2

e. Other (explain) _____

_____

18. Do you use any of the following types of proficiency assessment remedial programs? (Circle one number in each lettered row.)

	Yes	No
a. Regular classroom program	1	2
b. Pull-out program (special class)	1	2
c. After-school program	1	2
d. Summer school program	1	2
e. Tutorial program	1	2

f. Other (explain) _____

_____

19. FOR SECONDARY ONLY: What teacher-pupil ratio is being used during 1979-80 for proficiency assessment remedial programs? (Circle one number in each lettered row.)

	None of the programs	Some of the programs	Most of the programs
a. Less than 1:3	1	2	3
b. 1:4 to 1:15	1	2	3
c. 1:16 to 1:30	1	2	3
d. More than 1:30	1	2	3

D. EFFECTS ON SPECIAL POPULATIONS

20. How do you think proficiency requirements will affect the drop-out rate in your district? (Circle one number.)

1. Increase
2. No effect
3. Decrease
4. Other (explain) _____

_____

21. Have the proficiency requirements influenced bilingual instruction in your district? (Circle one number.)

1. Yes
2. No

Explain briefly.

_____

_____

_____

_____

22. FOR SECONDARY ONLY: For each grade level below, please estimate: (a) the number of students who failed the 1978-79 proficiency test; (b) the number of students who are receiving remedial instruction in 1979-80 as a result of proficiency assessment; and (c) percent of those students who also receive Title I/EDY or LES/NES bilingual services.

Grade	Number of students failing 1978-79 proficiency test	Number of students receiving remedial instruction	Percent (%) of students in proficiency assessment remedial programs who also qualify for: Title I/ EDY funds	LES/NES program
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				

23. The law provides that local governing boards have an option to provide "differential standards" for students who are in special education programs and have learning disabilities which would preclude them from meeting the district's regular standards. Choose the option below which best describes the policy your board has adopted. (Circle one number.)

1. District provides differential standards for students on an individual basis
2. District provides differential standards by categories of student disability
3. District does not provide differential standards
4. District board has not considered yet
5. Other (explain) _____

_____

Please attach a copy of your policy about differential standards.

24. Has your district taken any steps to investigate the possibility of cultural bias in your proficiency test? (Circle one number.)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Do not know

25. If yes, what procedures have you used? (Circle appropriate numbers.)

1. Item content review
2. Revision on the basis of field test information
3. Expert/community review of test items
4. Other (explain) _____

_____

26. If no, explain briefly. _____

_____

E. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS

27. Would your district find technical assistance useful in the following areas? (Circle one number in each lettered row.)

		Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
a.	Test construction and revision	1	2	3
b.	Field testing	1	2	3
c.	Setting passing scores	1	2	3
d.	Detecting and eliminating test bias . .	1	2	3
e.	Developing alternative modes of assessment	1	2	3
f.	Scoring writing samples	1	2	3
g.	Data management/recordkeeping	1	2	3
h.	Reporting test results	1	2	3
i.	Conferencing with students and parents .	1	2	3
j.	Using proficiency assessment results for diagnosis	1	2	3
k.	Motivating students who fail	1	2	3
l.	Supplementary instruction/remedial strategies	1	2	3
m.	Teaching test-taking strategies	1	2	3
n.	Linking proficiency test content to curriculum and instruction	1	2	3
o.	Elementary-secondary articulation . .	1	2	3
p.	Proficiency assessment of limited- and non-English speakers	1	2	3
q.	Other (specify) _____ .	1	2	3
	_____ .	1	2	3

28. Please rate the technical assistance materials and workshops provided by the State Department of Education. (Circle one number in each lettered row.)

	Helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful	Never saw or used this
a. Technical Assistance Guide (TAG).	1	2	3	4
b. Sample Assessment Exercises Manuals (SAEM)	1	2	3	4
c. SAEM Workshops	1	2	3	4
d. Proficiency Assessment Networking Workshops (summer, 1979)	1	2	3	4

29. Costs: Although districts are not required to keep detailed records of proficiency assessment costs, we are interested in how much you have spent on implementing proficiency assessment requirements. We would appreciate your attaching any documentation you might have about these costs.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. If you have any additional comments about proficiency requirements, please add them in the space below or attach additional sheets as needed.

Other Publications Available from the Department of Education

Proficiency Assessment in California: A Status Report is one of approximately 450 publications that are available from the California State Department of Education. Some of the more recent publications or those most widely used are the following:

Accounting Procedures for Student Organizations (1979)	$ 1.50
An Assessment of the Writing Performance of California High School Seniors (1977)	2.75
Bicycle Rules of the Road in California (1977)	1.50
California Guide to Parent Participation in Driver Education (1978)	3.15
California Master Plan for Special Education (1974)	1.00†
California Private School Directory (1980)	5.00
California Public School Directory (1980)	11.00
California Public Schools Selected Statistics, 1977-78 (1979)	1.00
California School Accounting Manual (1978)	1.65
California School Energy Concepts (1978)	.85
California School Lighting Design and Evaluation (1978)	.85
California Schools Beyond Serrano (1979)	.85
Child Care and Development Services: Report of the Commission to Formulate a State Plan (1978)	2.50
Computers for Learning (1977)	1.25
Discussion Guide for the California School Improvement Program (1978)	1.50†*
District Master Plan for School Improvement (1979)	1.50*
English Language Framework for California Public Schools (1976)	1.50
Establishing School Site Councils: The California School Improvement Program (1977)	1.50†*
Evaluation Report of Consolidated Application Programs (1979)	2.25
Genetic Conditions: A Resource Book and Instructional Guide (1977)	1.30
Guidance Services in Adult Education (1979)	2.25
Guide for Multicultural Education: Content and Context (1977)	1.25
Guide for Ongoing Planning (1977)	1.10
Handbook for Instruction on Aging (1978)	1.75
Handbook for Planning an Effective Reading Program (1979)	1.50*
Handbook for Reporting and Using Test Results (1976)	8.50
A Handbook Regarding the Privacy and Disclosure of Pupil Records (1978)	.85
Health Instruction Framework for California Public Schools (1978)	1.35
Improving the Human Environment of Schools (1979)	2.50
Liability Insurance in California Public Schools (1978)	2.00
A New Era in Special Education: California's Master Plan in Action (1980)	2.00
Parents Can Be Partners (1978)	1.35†
Pedestrian Rules of the Road in California (1979)	1.50
Pedestrian Rules of the Road in California, Primary Edition (1980)	1.50
Physical Education for Children, Ages Four Through Nine (1978)	2.50
Planning for Multicultural Education as a Part of School Improvement (1979)	1.25*
Planning Handbook (1978)	1.50*
Publicizing Adult Education Programs (1978)	2.00
Putting It Together with Parents (1979)	.85†
Resource Catalog for Proficiency Assessment (1978)	.85
Sample Assessment Exercises, Proficiency Assessment, Elementary (2 Vol.) (1978)	54.00
Sample Assessment Exercises, Proficiency Assessment, Secondary (2 Vol.) (1978)	54.00
Science Framework for California Public Schools (1978)	1.65
Site Management (1977)	1.50
Social Sciences Education Framework for California Public Schools (1975)	1.10
State Guidelines for School Athletic Programs (1978)	2.20
Student Achievement in California Schools (1979)	1.25
Students' Rights and Responsibilities Handbook (1980)	1.50†
Survey of Basic Skills: Grade Three–Rationale and Content (1980)	1.50
Teaching About Sexually Transmitted Diseases (1980)	1.65
Technical Assistance Guide for Proficiency Assessment (1979)	7.50
A Unified Approach to Occupational Education: Report of the Commission on Vocational Education (1979)	2.00

Orders should be directed to:

California State Department of Education
P.O. Box 271
Sacramento, CA 95802

Remittance or purchase order must accompany order. Purchase orders without checks are accepted only from government agencies in California. Sales tax should be added to all orders from California purchasers.

A complete list of publications available from the Department may be obtained by writing to the address listed above.

†Also available in Spanish, at the price indicated.
*Developed for implementation of AB 65.

END OF DOCUMENT

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